Judaism in Context 19

Reshaping Identities in Late Antique Syria-Mesopotamia

Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics and Narrative Strategies

By
Aryeh Kofsky
Serge Ruzer

In Collaboration With
Reuven Kipperwasser

gorgias press

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19

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Gorgias Press LLC, 954 River Road, Piscataway, NJ, 08854, USA

www.gorgiaspress.com

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2016 a

ISBN 978-1-4632-0590-4 **ISSN 1935-6978**

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kofsky, Arieh, author. | Ruzer, Serge, author. | Kiperwasser, Reuven,
author.
Title: Reshaping identities in Late Antique Syria-Mesopotamia : Christian and
Jewish hermeneutics and narrative strategies / by Aryeh Kofsky ; by Serge
Ruzer ; in collaboration with Reuven Kiperwasser.
Other titles: Judaism in context ; 19. 1935-6978
Description: Piscataway, NJ : Gorgias Press, 2016. | Series: Judaism in
context, ISSN 1935-6978 ; 19 | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016017351 | ISBN 9781463205904
Subjects: LCSH: Syriac Christians--History--To 1500. | Judaism--Relations--Christianity. | Christianity and other
religions--Judaism. | Hermeneutics--Religious aspects--Christianity. |
Hermeneutics--Religious aspects--Judaism.
Classification: LCC BX173.3 .K64 2016 | DDC 281/.6309015--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016017351

Printed in the United States of America

In memory of our fathers:

Gad Kiperwasser
Ze'ev Kofsky
Lev Ruzer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents v
Preface vii
Introduction 1

PART 1
THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA AND THE GREEK-SYRIAC DIVIDE OF SYRIAN CHRISTIANITY

Chapter One: Transformed Christology in Response to Crises 29
Introduction 29
Theology 33
Christology 35
The Hermeneutics of Loose-Union Christology 52
Conclusion 55

Chapter Two: Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ 57
From Biblical Past to Incarnation 57
The Disciples' Long Road to Understanding 59
The Unfulfilled Potential of the Jews 66
John the Baptist 69
Human Development in Christ 71
Conclusion 78

Chapter Three: Anthropology and Soteriology 81
Pneumatology in Context 91
Conclusion 100

Chapter Four: On Jews and Judaism 103
Pre-Incarnation Judaism and Its Limitations 106
Jesus' Message and Contemporaneous Jewish Milieu 108
Jesus and the Torah 117
Conclusion 118

PART 2
SYRIAC CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN A
SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN CULTURAL SETTING

Chapter Five: Syriac and Rabbinic Narratives on Zoroastrian Oral Culture: The Case of a Persian Convert 123
A Persian Outsider and Two Jewish Sages 126
The Story of My Master Īšōʿsabran (ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܡܪܝ ܥܒܕ ܝܫܘܥ) 140
Zoroastrians Construed as the Other 147
Conversion and the Study of Scripture 150
Conclusion 151
Appendix: *Mana hi alaf* (What Alaph is)? 154

Chapter Six: Broader Cultural Patterns in Jewish and Christian Discourse 163
Travel hazards as formative experience: Common sources of rabbinic and Syriac narratives 164
Barsauma in the midst of a sea tempest: Exploring the sources of a narrative bricolage 170
Conclusion 179

Chapter Seven: Competition for Sacred Space: Barsauma's *Vita* and Rabbinic Traditions 181
Barsauma in Jerusalem 194
Narrative strategies and historical circumstances 204
Genesis Rabbah and Jewish Messianic activism 208
Conclusion 212

Conclusion 217
Bibliography 225
Primary sources 225
Secondary sources 230

Index 257
Index of Names and Subjects 257
Index of Biblical Verses 264

PREFACE

This book sums up our recent studies in Christian and Jewish hermeneutics as a means of reshaping religious identities in Late Antique Syria-Mesopotamia. In a way, it continues the line of research reflected in our earlier volume *Syriac Idiosyncrasies: Theology and Hermeneutics in Early Syriac Literature* (Leiden, 2010). Here, however, the prime focus is on two foundational borderlines – between the Syriac and Greek brands of Syrian Christianity, on the one hand, and between the Syriac Christian and contemporaneous Jewish traditions, on the other. In this book, especially in its second part, we enjoyed the collaboration with our friend and colleague Reuven Kiperwasser.

We would like to thank Evelyn Katrak for her diligent and rigorous editing of the manuscript. We are most grateful for the financial support provided by the Israel Science Foundation (founded by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities).

Aryeh Kofsky and Serge Ruzer
Jerusalem
April 2016

INTRODUCTION

An intriguing topic that has lately drawn increased scholarly attention is the composite nature of early Syriac Christianity's identity vis-à-vis its Syrian-Greek counterpart in the context of the late antique Eastern Roman Empire and Sasanian Mesopotamia. This question is intrinsically connected to Syriac Christianity's genesis from an indigenous Christian Aramaic background as well as its interaction with the neighboring Jewish milieu. The geographical and cultural affinity of the two communities – Syriac Christian and Mesopotamian Jewish, with the Aramaic (Syriac) language being common to both of them – strongly suggests the possibility of religious and cultural contacts between them. Generally speaking, Syriac Christianity may be viewed as vying for a distinct group identity, being affected by these two challenging religious entities: Greek Christianity and Babylonian Judaism.

The complex cultural predicament of Syriac Christianity seems to have had a precedent, *mutatis mutandis*, in the hybrid Syrian-Roman identity of late Hellenistic and Roman pagan Syrian society. Nathanael Andrade has recently argued that Hellenism in Syria was expressed through regional practices and idioms that redefined Greek cultural identity; Greekness retained its status within the local framework, offering new ways for Syrians to articulate prestige and authority. Consequently, provincial Syrians generated an indigenous culture through the integration of Greek signs and narratives into a spectrum of intersecting idioms signifying Syrianness.[1]

[1] See N. J. Andrade, *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2013), esp. pp. 2–21, 343–348.

An independent Christian Syriac identity in early and mid-fourth century Mesopotamia can be discerned in early Syriac literature, notably in such authors as Aphrahat and Ephrem. Some of its characteristic features were highlighted in several foundational studies that emphasized, *inter alia*, Syrian asceticism.[2] A number of previously understudied 'Syriac idiosyncrasies' – mainly pertaining to trinitarian theology, christology and hermeneutics – were discussed in our joint 2010 volume.[3] To what extent do all these idiosyncrasies amount to a peculiar Syriac brand of early Christianity? Can it be distinguished by its Aramaic background, its affinity to the Jewish milieu and, on the other hand, its relative detachment from Greek Christianity? These questions were tentatively addressed in the volume's conclusion.

Later, a gradual diffusion of Edessene Aramaic among Christian communities west of the Euphrates in the fifth century, accompanied by an adaptation of Greek terminology and resulting

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[2] See A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 2 vols. (Louvain, 1960); R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge, 1975); S. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Kottayam, 1979); B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East* (Leiden, 2009). See also S. Brock, 'Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,' in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Väter und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Eichstatt, 1981), pp. 11–40; *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome, 1985); 'Fire from Heaven: From Abel's Sacrifice to the Eucharist. A Theme in Syriac Christianity,' *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993), pp. 229–243; S. H. Griffith, '"Singles" in God's Service: Thoughts on *Ihidaye* from the Works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian,' *The Harp* 4 (1991), pp. 145–159; 'Monks, "Singles," and the "Sons of the Covenant": Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology,' in E. Carr, A. A. Thiermeyer and E. Velkovska (eds), *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of R. Taft* (Rome, 1993), pp. 141–160; 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism,' in V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds), *Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 220–245.

[3] S. Ruzer and A. Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies: Theology and Hermeneutics in Early Syriac Literature* (Brill, 2010).

in the Syriac eclipse of other Aramaic dialects,[4] turned the Edessene dialect into a prestigious quasi-national language.[5] Indeed, as Phillip Wood has recently asserted, one may not speak in terms of a unified Syriac Christianity distinct from Roman Christianity at large; it is, however, possible to discern certain distinctive local patterns of language, concepts and religious practice. Wood suggests seeing these features as potential markers delineating a group identity based primarily on territory and local history, and tied together to create different models of a culturally independent ethno-religious entity alongside the other neighboring Christianities.[6] Sergey Minov recently discussed the Sasanian context and dimension of one such quasi-national invented history, introducing into the identity equation not only general Sasanian culture, but also East Syrian Christianity and Mesopotamian Jewry.[7]

The growing exposure to and close contact with Greek-speaking Syrian communities and literature would in turn lead to the later surrender to Greek patristic hegemony. Yet in the second half of the sixth century, the forces of Syriac identity among both the Western and the Eastern Syrian Churches, paradoxically rallied again, this time largely motivated by opposition to Byzantium and Chalcedon and later facilitated by the divide created by the Islamic

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[4] See S. Brock, 'Greek and Syriac in Late Antique Syria,' in A. Bowman, and G. Woolf (eds), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 149–160. See also S. Brock, 'Greek into Syriac and Syriac into Greek,' in S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), II.

[5] See P. Wood, *'We have no king but Christ': Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585)* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 78–79.

[6] See Wood, *Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria*, pp. 80–81. Wood argues that unlike the earlier period, characterized by Fergus Millar as one of 'historical amnesia,' the fifth and sixth centuries witnessed the invention of a quasi-national Syriac history asserting cultural independence (ibid., p. 83).

[7] See S. Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia: The Cave of Treasures in Context* (unpubl. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013).

conquest.[8] This 'new' identity, however, seems to have retained few of the salient early Syriac features, becoming to a large extent a Greek Christianity in Syriac garb. On the other hand, it may very well be that the emergence of a Syriac-speaking Church in close contact with Greek-speaking Syrian communities in turn affected the latter and produced a local hybrid of Greek Christianity. It is the hegemonic influence of this special brand, accompanied by voluminous translations of Greek patristic literature in the 5th–6th centuries, which would eventually become dominant among Syriac-speaking Christianity.

As for interaction with the Jews, the research, as noted, has relied on a presupposition that the geographical and cultural affinity of the two communities – with the Aramaic (Syriac) language being common to both – strongly suggests the possibility of religious and cultural contacts between them.[9] Thus, for example, some paradigmatic peculiarities of the early Syriac outlook, such as the basic absence of explicit trinitarian and Nicene theology in the writings of Aphrahat (first half of the fourth century) and their merely rudimentary christology, as well as certain aspects of exegesis found in Ephrem, have prompted comments

[8] See B. ter Haar Romeny, 'Les Pères grecs dans les florilèges exégétiques syriaques,' in A. Schmidt and D. Gonnet (eds), *Les Pères grecs dans la tradition syriaque* (Paris, 2007), pp. 63–76; A. Juckel, 'La réception des Pères grecs pendant la "Renaissance" syriaque: Renaissance – acculturation – identité,' in ibid., pp. 89–126; S. P. Brock, 'Charting the Hellenization of a Literary Culture: The Case of Syriac,' *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 3 (2015), pp. 98–124; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, 'Monastic Hybridity and Anti-Exegetical Discourse: From Philoxenus of Mabbug to Dadišo Qatraya' (forthcoming).

[9] The spectrum of existing appraisals of these links (from actual influence all the way to the *Zeitgeist*), the methodological problems involved and possible ways of resolving them have recently been discussed in A. Becker, 'The Comparative Study of "Scholasticism" in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians,' *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 34.1 (2010), pp. 91–113.

concerning their 'biblical' or 'Jewish' character.[10] Opposition to the doctrine of the *logos* as an agent of creation, which may have been

[10] See F. Gavin, *Aphraates and the Jews* (Toronto, 1923); J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 130–131; M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage persan: Les exposés*, SC 349 (Paris, 1988), SC 359 (Paris, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 144–145, 156–162. See also A. Baumstark, 'Ps-Jonathan zu Dtn 34,6 und die Pentateuchzitate Afrahats,' *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 18 (1942/3), pp. 99–111; J. Ouellette, 'Sens et portée de l'argument scriptuaire chez Aphraate,' in R. H. Fischer (ed.), *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 191–202; J. G. Snaith, 'Aphrahat and the Jews,' in J. A. Emerton and S. C. Reif (eds), *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of E. I. J. Rosenthal* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 235–250. D. J. Lane ('Of Wars and Rumors of Peace: Apocalyptic Material in Aphrahat and Šubhalmaran,' in P. J. Harland and C. T. R. Hayward [eds], *New Heaven and New Earth: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston* [Leiden, 1999], pp. 229–245, esp. 244–245) discerns targumic elements in Aphrahat's apocalyptic reading of Scripture. Cf. N. Koltun-Fromm ('A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 [1996], pp. 45–63), who does not exclude the possibility of Aphrahat's contact also with rabbinic circles; and E. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg (*Aphrahat's Demonstrations: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia* [Louvain, 2012]), who carries this argument even further. For a more complex background to Aphrahat's thought, which may have included elements of Jewish Hellenistic and Greco-Roman culture, see R. Murray, 'Hellenistic-Jewish Rhetoric in Aphrahat,' in R. Lavenant (ed.), *III Symposium Syriacum: Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures* (Rome, 1983), pp. 79–85. See also S. Brock, 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979), pp. 212–232; E. Narinskaya, *Ephrem, a 'Jewish Sage': A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions* (Turnhout, 2010); Ruzer & Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 41–60; Y. Monnickendam, *Halakhic Issues in the Writings of the Syriac Church Fathers Ephrem and Aphrahat* (unpubl. diss., Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2011), pp. 132–162, 258–259; A. Golitzin, 'Recovering the "Glory of Adam": "Divine Light" Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia,' in J. R. Davila (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden,

common also in rabbinic circles, could be another possible source for Aphrahat's logos concept.[11] And of course, the research has addressed possible points of contact with regard to patterns of biblical exegesis.[12]

The inroads made by earlier research have produced instructive results and a whole spectrum of appraisals concerning the nature of the communication (or lack thereof) among the groups and communities in question. Even if mostly dealing with specific avenues and isolated cases of possible interaction – e.g., particular dependence on a tradition coming from the other side of the Jewish-Christian or intra-Christian divides – they have prepared the ground for a systematic investigation of various paradigms of interaction and, most prominently, of their functioning in the identity-forming process in which Syriac Christianity was involved.

This volume presents case studies of the repertoire of phenomena that contributed to group identity in late antique Syria-Mesopotamia. Heuristically, we focus on traditions reflecting interaction either between Judaism and Christianity or among

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2003), pp. 275–308. Cf. R. H. Connolly ('The Early Syriac Creed,' *Zeitschrift für die neutestamenliche Wissenschaft* 7 [1906], pp. 202–223, esp. pp. 202–203), who sees some points in Aphrahat's argument as consciously anti-Nicene. According to P. Schwen (*Afrahat: Seine Person und sein Verständnis des Christentums. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Kirche im Osten* [Berlin, 1907], pp. 59, 62, 91), although Aphrahat's church had a 'tripartite' notion of faith, its form and content cannot be ascertained, and this notion in itself was not highly valued. Thus the trinitarian formulas, baptismal and others, that nevertheless appear in Aphrahat should be understood as elements of a foreign outlook and as taken from the liturgy. See also F. Loofs (*Theophilus von Antiochien Adversus Marcionem und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus* [Leipzig, 1930], pp. 258, 260), who regards Aphahat's christology as basically Messsianic-Johannine.

[11] D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 87–137.

[12] See, for example, G. Stemberger, 'Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire,' in M. Sæbo (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. I, part 1 (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 569–611.

various Christian groups in Syria-Mesopotamia, as well as their relation to other religious traditions of Late Antiquity (e.g., Zoroastrianism or 'paganism'). Studying Christian, Jewish and other sources that deal with the establishment, modification and deletion of boundaries, we aim to create a frame of reference that would in turn explain and contextualize the existing evidence concerning communication and interaction between highly diverse groups in Late Antiquity.

The emphasis here is on multifaceted modes of interaction within Syrian-Mesopotamian Christianity – both Greek- and Syriac-speaking – and with Jewish traditions of mainly Babylonian provenance. Our approach will hopefully both yield specific insights into the ideological fabric of individual works and contribute to formulating general theses concerning the functioning of boundary-drawing processes that can be applied in other areas of ancient history too.

We build upon and continue the investigation, started in our joint 2010 volume,[13] of the paradigms of 'theoretical' boundary marking. Aphrahat and Ephrem can be regarded, at least to some extent, as representatives of fourth-century Syriac Christianity or Christianities. Their peculiar traits or idiosyncrasies, notably in christology and hermeneutics, may therefore be perceived as characteristic of their respective communities.

One of Aphrahat's peculiar traits that has attracted scholarly attention is his seemingly crude pre-trinitarian theological outlook. As noted, the basic absence of explicit trinitarian and Nicene theology in Aphrahat's writings, and their merely rudimentary christology, has prompted remarks concerning their 'biblical/Jewish' character.[14] However, since it is almost impossible

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[13] Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, see note 3 above.

[14] See Connolly, 'The Early Syriac Creed,' pp. 202–203. According to P. Schwen (*Afrahat*, pp. 59, 62, 91), trinitarian formulas in Aphrahat should be understood as elements taken from the liturgy and not necessarily reflecting a developed theology. See also Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien*, pp. 258, 260; Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, pp. 130–131; Pierre, *Aphraate le sage persan*, vol. 1, pp. 144–145, 156–162; Murray, 'Hellenistic-Jewish Rhetoric in Aphrahat,' pp. 79–85.

to trace in Aphrahat acquaintance with earlier Christian Greek literature, it may be alternatively suggested that Aphrahat's concepts represent, at least partially, an original line of thinking rooted in an independent ancient Aramaic Christian tradition.[15]

Specifically, Aphrahat seems to emphasize exclusively the Father as creator without ascribing any role to the Logos-Christ in the process of creation.[16] As suggested above, opposition to the doctrine of the logos as an agent of creation may have been common also in rabbinic circles and could be another possible source for Aphrahat's logos concept.[17] The suppression of the mediating role of the logos in creation, emphasizing the exclusive role of the Father – attested implicitly already in the *Old Syriac Gospels*[18] – distinguishes Aphrahat's outlook from later Syriac writers. This is evident especially in his concept of Adam's creation, where he pointedly differs from Ephrem, who already reads trinitarian exegesis into the plural in Genesis 1:26 ('Let us make man in our image…').[19]

Moreover, Aphrahat seems to advocate a quasi-hypostatic existence of the logos that was generated *in time* for soteriological purposes from the essence of the Father.[20] This view is somehow

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[15] See, for example, Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien*, pp. 258–259, 296. According to Loofs there is in fact no Greek influence on Aphrahat's Syriac and no explicit evidence for his use of LXX. Schwen (*Afrahat*, p. 61), however, argues for a specific affinity between Origen and Aphrahat on one particular point.

[16] For an extensive reevaluation of Aphrahat's theology, see Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idionsyncrasies*, pp. 7–40. For a radically different, more 'traditional' understanding of the Son as creator in Aphrahat, see, for example, Pierre, *Aphraate*, vol. 1, pp. 151–152.

[17] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, pp. 87–137.

[18] See Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 169–178.

[19] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.28, ed. R.-M. Tonneau, CSCO 153, Scriptores Syri 72 (Louvain, 1955). See Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 41–60.

[20] Cf. P. Bruns (*Das Christusbild Aphrahats des Persischen Weisen*, Hereditas, Studien zur Alten Kirchengeschichte 4 [Bonn, 1990], p. 140),

reminiscent of that ascribed to Paul of Samosata regarding the monarchic existence of the Father before the incarnation.[21] In christology Aphrahat was a precursor of the Antiochene line of a loose-union christology, holding that the Word rested on the human Jesus as one person upon another, and also that the incarnate Christ differed only in degree from the prophets.[22] For Aphrahat, moreover, in this latter, post-incarnation phase, the logos seems 'to dwell in the flesh' – not only of Christ but also of each believer destined for resurrection.[23]

Aphrahat further postulates a mode of divine noetic existence for Adam, as the first to be conceived in God's mind before actual creation,[24] and it may be surmised that Aphrahat assumed a similar preexistence for Christ.[25] Views advocating the noetic preexistence of the patriarchs and the Messiah are well attested in early Jewish sources.[26] Thus in 1 Enoch we find a tradition in which the Messiah was 'called by name' before creation.[27] A similar tradition of the noetic conception in God's mind as preceding actual

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who perceives a concept of monarchic dynamism in Aphrahat and regards the evidence for the hypostatic preexistence of the logos as inconclusive.

[21] See Schwen, *Afrahat*, p. 83. Against this assessment, see, e.g., I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Die Gottheit Christi bei Afrahat*, Orientalia Christiana 31.1 (Rome, 1933), p. 123.

[22] See G. Bardy, *Paul de Samosate: Étude historique*, SSL 4 (Louvain, 1923); F. Loofs, *Paulus von Samosata*, TU 40 (Leipzig, 1924); H. D. Riedmatten, *Les Actes du procès de Paul de Samosate: Étude sur la christologie du IIIe au IVe siècle*, Paradosis 6 (Fribourg, 1952).

[23] Aphrahat, *Dem.* 8.15, ed. I. Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca 1 (Paris, 1894). *Demonstration* 23, Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca 2 (Paris, 1907), cols. 1–150.

[24] *Dem.* 17.7.

[25] See also Bruns, *Das Christusbild Aphrahats*, p. 135.

[26] For a discussion of the heavenly existence of both Old Testament and contemporaneous charismatic figures in the late Second Temple period, see M. Navon, *Messianic Figures in Second Temple Judaism: Relationship between the Charismatic Leader and His Adherents* (unpubl. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004).

[27] 1 Enoch 48:1–9.

creation is applied in midrashic traditions roughly contemporaneous with Aphrahat not only to Adam and the Messiah but also to the patriarchs and even to the collective entity of Israel.[28]

In fact, Aphrahat himself presents his reasoning as addressed to Jewish counterparts, and this may serve as an indication of his actual contacts with a Jewish milieu. The same holds true regarding Aphrahat's parable depicting the created world as the marriage feast prepared by God for his son Adam.[29] Other rabbinic parallels speak of the world as being created for the sake, alternatively, of prominent figures in Israel's history, the righteous, the people of Israel as a whole or the Torah – another possible indication of Aphrahat's acquaintance with contemporaneous Jewish thought.[30]

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[28] See *Gen. R.* 1.4; *b. Sanh.* 38b; *Midrash Psalms* 139. Cf. *Gen. R.* 8; *Lev. R.* 29. Cf. 1 Enoch 48:1–9. On the possible midrashic background of Aphrahat's thought, see Gavin, *Aphraates and the Jews*, pp. 38–58; Nuesner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, pp. 150–154.

[29] *Dem.* 17.7. For rabbinic parallels depicting the creation as preparation for the feast of Adam and Eve, see *y. Sanh.* 4.9 [22c]; *b. Sanh.* 38a. For a pioneering study of possible rabbinic elements in Aphrahat, see S. Funk, *Die haggadischen Elemente in den Homilien des Aphraates, des persischen Weisen* (Vienna, 1891). For a recent topical discussion, see N. Koltun-Fromm, 'Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of the Jewish-Christian Polemic,' in J. Frishman and L. van Rompay (eds), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretations* (Louvain, 1997), pp. 57–72.

[30] See, e.g., *Mas. Gerim* 1.1; *Gen. R.* 16.12, 83.5; *Lev. R.* 23.3; *Cant. R.* 2.3, 7.3; *Pesiq. R.* 3. Some scholars have more specifically suggested that Aphrahat was familiar with a milieu that can be characterized as biblical or scriptural-targumic Judaism, though more recently it has been argued that he may very well have had contacts also with rabbinic circles. Neusner (*Aphrahat and Judaism*, pp. 130–131) suggests that Aphrahat's christology in *Dem.* 17 was addressed to new converts from a milieu that he characterizes as scriptural-targumic Judaism. See also Baumstark, 'Ps-Jonathan zu Dtn 34,6,' pp. 99–111; Ouellette, 'Sens et portée de l'argument scriptuaire chez Aphraate,' pp. 191–202; Snaith, 'Aphrahat and the Jews,' pp. 235–250. Lane ('Of Wars and Rumors of Peace,' pp. 244–245) discerns targumic elements in Aphrahat's apocalyptic reading of

All differences notwithstanding, it seems that Aphrahat did entertain a certain notion of incarnation, albeit undeveloped, reflected mainly in his use of the language of clothing or of putting on a body by the logos. Yet it is not possible to apply Aphrahat's christology of putting on the body to the schemes of *logos/sarx* and *logos/anthropos*. This ambiguity led both West Syrian (monophysite) and East Syrian (Nestorian) theologians to use Aphrahat in support of their views.[31] In some instances, Aphrahat's wording clearly signifies the clothing of the soul with a human body, as is common to all newborns, the Messiah included.[32]

Several times, however, Aphrahat refers specifically to the putting on of a body by the Messiah in a way that seems to be intrinsically connected to the sending of the Christ-Logos into the world and hence to his salvific mission. This pattern of thought, though no more than implicit, becomes apparent when Aphrahat distinguishes between the different 'natures' of Christ's existence before and after his birth and the putting on of a body.[33]

The exact meaning of 'nature' (ܨܒܐ) in Aphrahat has been much debated. Some scholars regard Aphrahat's use of the term 'nature' as essentialist and close to that of patristic theology; and they further perceive Aphrahat's stance as basically conservative Antiochene – namely, two perfect natures united in the one persona of Christ.[34] The overall ensuing impression is, however,

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Scripture. Cf. Koltun-Fromm, 'A Jewish-Christian Conversation,' pp. 45–63; Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations*.

[31] See Brock, 'Clothing Metaphors,' p. 25.

[32] See also Bruns (*Das Christusbild Aphrahats*, p. 193), who regards this lack of distinction between Christ's incarnation and the 'incarnation' (i.e., becoming human) of other men as understandable in light of Aphrahat's seeing a close connection between anthropology and christology.

[33] *Dem.* 6.10.

[34] F. P. Ridolfini, 'Problema trinitario e problema cristologico nelle "dimostrazioni" del "sapiente persiano,"' *Studi e Ricerche sull'Oriente Cristiano* 2 (1979), pp. 99–125, esp. 107–109. According to Loofs (*Theophilus von Antiochien*, pp. 274–275, 297), though for Aphrahat the united person of the historical Jesus was larger than the one *prosopon* of the

that although Aphrahat may have generally accepted some primitive form of incarnation doctrine and language, it nevertheless did not occupy an important place in his christology, which primarily aims at clarifying its soteriological content. The recurring notion of the Messiah putting on a body, and its analogy to ordinary human birth, may indicate an understanding of the relation between the incarnate logos and the human body, or the human body and the soul of Christ, where Aphrahat reflects some sort of a 'proto-Antiochene' concept regarding this issue.

The notion of Jesus' priestly Aaronic descent coexisted in early Christianity with the seemingly more established tradition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, stating explicitly that Jesus had no Aaronic ancestry but was a high priest of the order of Melchizedek.[35] Aphrahat, however, seems to express a variant view – namely, that Jesus received his priesthood spiritually from the house of Aaron through John the Baptist. This tradition combines the Aaronic descent of John the Baptist with the idea of a spiritual transmission of this priesthood in the act of Jesus' baptism.[36] It is noteworthy that although Aphrahat often refers to Hebrews, it is never to the Melchizedek passages. Apparently deriving from the Luke 1 presentation of John as the descendant of a priestly family,

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Antiochene union, he certainly did not think of a union of natures. Loofs, too, seems to cast Aphrahat here in an 'orthodox' mold, avoiding suspicion of quasi-Nestorian associations. Thus Loofs admits the 'diprosopic' character of Aphrahat's christological expression – derived however from West Syrian/Antiochene influence – but subordinates it to a basic concept of hypostatic unity in Christ.

[35] See D. Stökl, 'Yom Kippur in the Apocalyptic *Imaginaire* and the Roots of Jesus' High Priesthood,' in J. Assmann and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (Leiden, 1999), p. 364.

[36] On this tradition in Aphrahat and Ephrem (e.g., *Hymns Against Heresies* 22.19, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 169–170, Script. Syr. 76–77 [1957]), see Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 55, 178–182. In Ephrem there is also a variation on this theme: transferring the priesthood to Jesus through Simeon at the Temple, following Luke 2:25–35 (Ephrem, *Sermo de Domino Nostro* 53–54, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 270–271, Script. Syr. 116–117 (1966).

this tradition may reflect a more 'conservative' stance, preserving an echo of the old Jewish motif of the Aaronic Messiah. This tradition is also compatible with Aphrahat's more general tendency to emphasize the full humanity of Christ.

The attributes 'God' and 'son of God' do appear at the head of a long list of soteriological titles of Christ in Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 17: 'God son of God, the king son of the king, light of the light, son and counselor, guide and way, redeemer, shepherd, gatherer, gate, pearl, and lamp.' It may be surmised, however, that their non-scriptural presentation as part of a sequence – clearly penned by Aphrahat himself – reflects a consciously moderate concept of Christ's divinity expressed in these two attributes.[37] The application of these attributes to outstanding biblical personalities – the apologetic strategy adopted throughout *Demonstration* 17 – seems to constitute another way of relativizing the divinity of Christ.[38] Robert Murray, in fact, compared this list to the Jewish Day of Atonement prayer *ki anu amekha*, and to similar lists in Ephrem.[39] We can thus discern in Aphrahat a number of basic notions devaluing the divine status of Christ: first, the denial of

[37] Cf., for example, the sequence in John 14:6. See also John 6:35, 8:12, 10:7–14, 10:36, 11:15, 15:1–5, Matt 5:14–15. It is noteworthy that an extended list of soteriological titles, lacking explicit divine attributes, appears in Aphrahat in a non-polemical context where Christ's relation to God is described as 'the herald and the apostle of the Most High' (*Dem.* 14.39) with his soteriological function defined as that of a mediator between humanity and God: 'Therefore through him let us give thanks to the Father, through him let us worship his Appointer, through him let us cry "holy" to his Sender' (ibid.).

[38] For comparisons of biblical figures to Jesus in Aphrahat and Ephrem, see Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 51–53; R. Murray, 'Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature,' in Fischer (ed.), *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, pp. 109–131. On Aphrahat's hermeneutical strategy, see J. C. McCullough, 'Aphrahat the Biblical Exegete,' *Studia Patristica* 18.4 (1990), pp. 263–268. See also L. Haefeli, *Stilmittel bei Afrahat, dem persischen Weisen* (Leipzig, 1932); R. J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (Leiden, 1983).

[39] Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 162–166.

Christ's agency in creation; second, the relativization of the divine presence in Christ analogous to its presence in humanity in general; third, the common use of various divine appellations with regard to Christ alongside the exclusive assignation of the ultimate titles 'I am that I am, God Almighty' (ܐܗܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܐܗܝܐ ܐܠܗܐ)[40] and 'the Lord of Hosts' (ܡܪܝ ܚܝܠ), to God the Father and creator.[41]

Tracing Aphrahat's embryonic theological notions – apparently stemming from a lack of awareness of Nicaea – dispersed throughout Aphrahat's corpus and reassessing his primitive theology indicates an independent Syriac legacy. An outstanding feature of Aphrahat's theological discourse is that it is presented as molded to a large extent in the context of a Christian-Jewish matrix. This pertains especially to the questions of the sonship and divinity of the Messiah-Christ and his preexistence. Contrary, however, to the ascendant tendency in contemporaneous Greek theology, Aphrahat is distinguished by a clear propensity to devalue the divine status of Christ by denying his agency in creation, regarding the Christ-Logos as intrinsically linked to the historical appearance in the soteriological context of the incarnation, relativizing the divine presence in Christ and his divine attributes, and restricting the ultimate divine titles to God the creator. Aphrahat's understanding of Christ's divinity and the title 'God' attributed to him, like its attribution to other human beings, thus stands out as a salient, 'quasi-Arian' hierarchic concept, albeit lacking a precise terminology. As for his emphasis on the humanity of Christ, it should not be regarded as polemical and peculiar to Aphrahat; rather, it may reflect a broader tradition that had interpreted the common Christian terms in this way. Combined with the terminology of donning a human nature, this stance further indicates an affinity with a sort of proto-Antiochene

[40] The Syriac version in Aphrahat, referring to Exod 3:14, includes the addition of 'God Almighty (ܐܠܗܐ),' apparently adapted from Gen 17:1.

[41] *Dem.* 17.5. It is worth noting that these attributes are taken verbatim from the original biblical Hebrew. Cf. Ortiz de Urbina (*Die Gottheit Christi*, p. 68), who concludes that in *Demonstration* 17 Aphrahat, *stricto sensu*, does not present Christ's divinity.

christology that seems to have been widespread in Aphrahat's region.

Ephrem, Aphrahat's younger contemporary, is already heavily indebted to Nicene theological influence, and moreover seems to be explicitly in a polemic against some of the ideas propagated earlier by Aphrahat.[42] Influenced by Nicene trinitarian theology, Ephrem advocates a quasi-hypostatic understanding of the logos and its role in creation.[43] Regarding John 1:14, Ephrem's emphasis is decisively on the incarnation motif. Unlike Aphrahat, for Ephrem the logos here signifies neither the divine voice and message concerning the birth of Christ and the resurrection of the dead nor the divine power dwelling 'in us' active in the resurrection, but primarily the incarnation of the hypostatic preexistent logos.[44]

Ephrem, however, still retains considerable independence in his biblical exegesis, especially in his uncommon religious anthropology, his demythologizing tendencies and insistence – somewhat peculiar for a Christian author – on a balanced interaction between divine mercy and justice in God's dealings with humanity.[45] Studies of Ephrem have indicated many Jewish midrashic parallels, and their possible meaning may be debated.[46] If in theology Ephrem does not refer explicitly to 'Jewish concerns,' in his treatment of the protoplasts, for instance, he still evinces a notable awareness of quasi-midrashic baggage.

According to Ephrem, the crux of Adam and Eve's drama revolves around their moral autonomy vis-à-vis God's commandment. This affected not only his demythologizing exegetical tendency but also his disinterest in the traditional understanding of

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[42] Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* I.3, ed. and Latin trans. L. Leloir (Dublin, 1963). On the meaning of ܡܫܝܚܐ in Aphrahat and Ephrem, see E. Beck, 'Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm,' *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958), pp. 19–40.

[43] Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* I.4–5.

[44] Ibid., I.8.

[45] See Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 41–60.

[46] See, e.g., Brock, 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,' pp. 212–232; Narinskaya, *Ephrem, a 'Jewish Sage'*.

Adam's vocation in cultic terms. Another uncommon aspect of Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* is, as noted, the author's emphasis on the interplay between mercy and justice in God's interaction with men and women. Whereas Ephrem takes his emphasis on divine mercy to new limits, he also retains – contrary to common Christian exegesis – the importance of divine justice and the necessity of a moral test of obedience as a precondition for salvation. Likewise, Ephrem dispenses with Satan's punishment as an afterthought to the whole discussion of the punishments. This fits his general focus on the moral understanding of the story, marginalizing the role of the heavenly powers. An essentially similar religious anthropology is also at the core of the slightly later *Liber Graduum*, where earthly concerns, equated with evil and death, are introduced through the protoplasts' voluntary decision; consequently, as with Ephrem, Satan's role in the paradisiacal narrative is substantially marginalized.[47] One may also argue that this exegesis corresponds to Ephrem's general inclination toward a quasi-Antiochene 'low anthropology' and a literal interpretation of Scripture.

In fact, rabbinic sources predating Ephrem or contemporaneous with him provide parallels to most of the exegetical motifs invoked in his commentary on the story of Adam and Eve; in some instances Ephrem may even have had unmediated access to rabbinic traditions. In her recent dissertation on Ephrem, however, Yifat Monnickendam discerns that the affinity between Ephrem's writings and Jewish traditions exists specifically with regard to early rabbinic and even sectarian Jewish literature, especially from Palestinian sources mediated through Syriac Christianity, and she concludes that he had only limited contact with contemporary Jews.[48] Ephrem did not hesitate to use these traditions when this suited his exegetical needs, ignoring their possibly problematic connotations and their possible collision with common Christian views. In her monograph on Ephrem, Elena Narinskaya examines discernible parallels between his commentaries on Scripture and

[47] See Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 61–85.

[48] Monnickendam, *Halakhic Issues in the Writings of the Syriac Church Fathers*, pp. 132–162, 258–259.

Jewish sources, suggesting that his exegetical style resembles in many respects rabbinic approaches to Scripture. So much so that she defines Ephrem as a Christian heir of Jewish exegetical tradition, demonstrating the qualities and features of a Jewish sage – hence the title of her book *Ephrem, a 'Jewish' Sage*.[49] Indeed, Ephrem elsewhere took issue with the Jews;[50] however, as an exegete, his choice of exegetical options and his ways of shaping them were dictated first and foremost by his overall stance. The provenance of the traditions he employed – either Jewish or Christian – seems to have been of little if any concern to the Syrian author.

If Aphrahat and Ephrem can be regarded, at least to some extent, as representatives of fourth-century Syriac Christianity or Christianities, then their peculiar traits or idiosyncrasies, notably in christology and hermeneutics, may also be perceived as salient features of their Syriac-speaking communities. We have noted sporadically a few basic similarities between some of these traits and the so-called school of Antioch. But can these similarities perhaps be explained as affinities rather than general parallelisms? In other words, can we speak about an influence of early Syriac Christianity on Greek Syrian Christianity and, further, on the Antiochene tradition? Unfortunately, answering such a question involves quite a bit of guesswork. Yet a positive answer would also affect our traditional view of the rival 'schools' of Antioch and Alexandria as alternative creations of Greek Christianity. As will be seen, several characteristics of the chief representatives of the Antiochene tradition may confirm this intuition; it should also be borne in mind that in addition to its Greek-speaking Christians the city of Antioch in the fourth century had a large Aramaic-speaking Christian population as well as a distinct Greek- and Aramaic-speaking Jewish community.[51]

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[49] Narinskaya, *Ephrem, a 'Jewish Sage'*.

[50] For a discussion of Ephrem's anti-Jewish polemic, see C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (Washington, DC, 2008).

[51] See John Chrysostom, *Ad popul. Antioch.*, PG 49:188; *De sanct. Martyribus*, PG 50:646. For the social, cultural, religious and linguistic

Diodore of Tarsus, the school's first prominent figure and perhaps its true founder,[52] was a disciple of Eusebius of Emesa, a native of Edessa (c. 300), whose mother tongue was Syriac – 'a Syrian in Greek dress' as Ter Haar Romeny characterized him.[53] Eusebius is especially noteworthy for the clearly literalist tendency of his exegesis. In Diodore of Tarsus, in turn, we can find some precedents for Theodore of Mopsuestia's principal stance of loose-union christology. Already for Diodore, the incarnation is reduced to an indwelling of the logos: the logos assumed flesh but did not *become* flesh. Aiming to safeguard the divinity of the logos, Diodore had to find an alternative subject for Christ's human predicates. Hence, Christ would be perceived as two persons of sorts, whose loose union is described in typically Antiochene terms of 'assumption,' 'clothing' or 'indwelling.' Diodore's stance should be understood in the context of the christological polemics of his time.

However, Greek terminology and theological polemics notwithstanding, the basic underlying incarnation concept of the assumed man and the indwelling logos, the emphasis on Christ's humanity, and the devaluation and relativization of his divinity do

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situation in late antique Antioch, see, e.g., W. A. Meeks and R. L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula, Montana, 1978), pp. 13–52; D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 14–26; I. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge, 2007); J. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and His Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 42–87.

[52] See R. C. Hill, 'Diodore of Tarsus as Spiritual Director,' *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 71 (2005), pp. 413–430.

[53] R. B. Ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (Leuven, 1997). On Eusebius of Emesa, see É. M. Buytaert, *L'héritage littéraire d'Eusèbe d'Émèse. Étude critique et historique* (Louvain, 1949); M. Wiles, 'The Theology of Eusebius of Emesa,' *Studia Patrisica* 19 (1989), pp. 267–280; R. E. Winn, *Eusebius of Emesa: Church and Theology in the Mid-Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C. 2011).

not seem all that different from the crude christology of Aphrahat. In his exegesis Diodore followed the rationalist interpretation of his teacher Eusebius of Emesa and insisted on a literal and historical method, strenuously opposing 'the old wives' tales of the allegorists' and not looking for a hidden meaning in the text.[54] In his partially recovered *Commentary on Psalms* he allows messianic relevance to only four Psalms (2, 8, 44, 109).[55] This calls to mind, *mutatis mutandis*, Ephrem's general inclination toward literal interpretation and 'low anthropology'; the similarity between the Antiochene School and Ephrem's literalism and anti-allegorism, especially in his *Commentary on Genesis*, was already noted by Ter Haar Romeny.[56] Unfortunately, we are mostly dependent on insufficient fragments for the reconstruction of Diodore's theology and exegesis.[57]

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[54] Diodore of Tarsus, *Commentary on Psalms* 6.1, ed. J. M Olivier (Paris, 1980), p. 77. See also F. Petit, L.Van Rompay and J. J. S. Weitenberg (eds), *Eusèbe d'Émèse, Commentaire de la Genèse* (Leuven, 2011), pp. i–xxxix.

[55] On Diodore's commentary on Psalms, see M. J. Rondeau, 'Le "Commentaire des Psaumes" de Diodore de Tarse et l'exégèse antique du Psaume 109/10,' *Revue d'histoire des religions* 176 (1969), pp. 153–188; 177 (1970), pp. 5–33; M. J. Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier* (Rome, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 93–102; R. C. Hill (trans.), *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51* (Atlanta, 2005); B. D. Wayman, *Diodore the Theologian: Πρόνοια in his Commentary on Psalms* 1–50 (Turnhout, 2014).

[56] Ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress*, p. 93. For possible early Syriac origins of Antiochene christology, see also H. J. W. Drijvers, 'Early Forms of Antiochene Christology,' in C. Laga, J. Munitz and L. van Rompay (eds), *After Chalcedon. Studies in Theology and Church History* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 18; Louvain, 1985), pp. 99–113

[57] On Diodore's theology, see F. A. Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Rome, 1956), pp. 181–196; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1 (London, 1975), pp. 352–360. On Diodore's exegesis, see, E. Schweizer, 'Diodor als Exeget,' *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 40 (1941), pp. 33–75; F. Thome, *Historia contra Mythos: Die Schriftauslegung Diodors von Tarsus und Theodors von Mopsuestia im*

It is thanks to Theodore of Mopsuestia, who would further refine and expand the ideas of his master, that our picture of Antiochene tradition becomes much more detailed.[58] Theodore, however, was less a speculative theologian than an exegete, 'the Interpreter' as he would be called. In his so-called historical-grammatical and literal-critical exegesis, Theodore demonstrates acquaintance with Jewish traditions and usages, and he applies them in his critical views of Scripture. This was well noted by Leontius of Byzantium with regard to the book of Psalms: 'Following usage of the Jews he (i.e. Theodore) referred all the psalms to Zerubbabel and Hezekiah. He applied to the Lord only three psalms.'[59] Moreover, Theodore was inclined to accept only those Old Testament books recognized by the Jews, apparently according to the Jewish Hebrew canon. Thus, he does not quote the Old Testament apocrypha, which apparently did not belong in

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Widerstreit zu Kaiser Julians und Salustius' allegorischem Mythenverständnis (Bonn, 2004).

[58] On Theodore's theology, see also R. A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford, 1963); Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, pp. 421–439. On Antiochene Old Testament hermeneutics, see C. Schäublin, *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Cologne-Bonn, 1974); C. Schäublin, 'Die antiochenische Exegese des Alten Testaments,' in D. Papandreou (ed.), *L'Ancien Testament dans l'église* (Chambésy, 1988), pp. 115–128; D. Z. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis* (New York, 1989); R. C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch* (Leiden, 2005), esp. pp. 85–182. On Theodore's hermeneutics, see also M. Simonetti, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia,' in C. Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 799–828.

[59] Leontius of Byzantium, *Deprehensio et triumphus super Nestorianos*, PG 86:1365D. Theodore in fact considered the same four psalms recognized by Diodore as messianic prophecies. See J. J. O'Keefe, '"A Letter That Killeth": Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, Or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000), pp. 88–104; R. C. Hill, 'His Master's Voice: Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Psalms,' *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004), pp. 40–53.

his canon. Some scholars thought that Theodore's Jewish tendencies in his Old Testament exegesis derived from his knowledge of Hebrew; but there is not sufficient evidence to indicate that, even though he often uses the terms 'Hebrew voice' and 'Hebrew idiom' and refers to the original Hebrew text as the authentic source for correct understanding and as the vehicle of revelation.[60] In fact, a conspicuous trait of the Antiochenes is their close relationship to literal trends in Jewish exegesis.[61] This may also account for Theodore's mitigated supersessionism and relatively moderate attitude to Jews in general (see Part One, Chapter Four).

One may also note Theodore's strong opposition to christological interpretations of the psalms and other messianic *testimonia* entrenched in patristic literature, and to pre-incarnation revelations of the logos and the Holy Spirit to patriarchs and prophets.[62] According to Theodore, Old Testament prophecy as a whole does not present Christ directly but only lends itself to such interpretation because of its 'hyperbolic' imagery, rich metaphorical meaning and symbolism. This is part of Theodore's biblical theology of progressive revelation, which would eventually pertain even to Jesus' human development, where Theodore rejects Jesus' apocryphal childhood miracles (see Part One, Chapter Two).

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[60] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Psalms* 127, 133, 195, 249, ed. R. Devreese (Vatican, 1939); Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible*, pp. 56–57. Theodore's disciple, Theodoret of Cyrrhus – another great representative of the school – also shows familiarity with the works of Jewish authors and Jewish traditions, and even uses Jewish material as a background illustration for his argument.

[61] Nevertheless, for elements of the moderate 'spiritual' exegesis in the Antiochene tradition, see B. Nassif, 'The "Spiritual Exegesis" of Scripture: The School of Antioch Revisited,' *Anglican Theological Review* 70 (1993), pp. 437–470; B. Nassif, '"Spiritual Exegesis" in the School of Antioch,' in B. Nassif (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff* (Grand Rapids, 1996), pp. 343–377.

[62] See A. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed* (= *Catechetical Homilies*, Cambridge, 1932), p. 27.

Theodore occasionally also introduces variant Syriac readings from the Peshitta, sometimes preferring the Syriac to the Greek text; but these seem to depend on oral information and exegetical Syriac traditions,[63] and it appears that he had no solid knowledge of Syriac but received his information from bilingual Syrian clergymen. All this may well be a diffused legacy of sorts, albeit diluted and transformed, of an old 'Syriac way' faithfully witnessed by Aphrahat and Ephrem.

To sum up, we have tried to indicate above certain peculiar traits of Aramaic-speaking Syrian Christianity from the period when it was still relatively free of the hegemonic influence of the Greek-speaking Church. However, as the case of Theodore and other representatives of the Antiochene tradition indicates, the traffic of ideas and perceptions between Syriac and Greek discourse in Syria did not flow only one way; it appears that some fundamental attitudes and theological notions prevalent among Aramaic-speaking Christians were absorbed by their Greek-speaking brethren.

This development may also be seen as complemented by the ramifications in the complex attitudes of early Syriac Christianity toward Greek Christianity. Aphrahat appears to be untroubled by – indeed ignorant of – processes that had meanwhile taken place in the Greek-speaking Church, including the Council of Nicaea and its creed. Slightly later, Ephrem already adopts some of the 'Greek trends.' One more aspect of this early unapologetic self-reliance is the attitude of Syriac Christians to Syriac as not only the sacred tongue of Scripture but also the fountainhead of Christian theology. This attitude is manifest in Aphrahat and Ephrem, who use Syriac puns to substantiate their theological statements. All this confirms a plausible model of an indigenous early Syriac Christianity gradually entering into a dynamic interaction with the Greek

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[63] E.g., Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Habakkuk*, PG 66:437C; *Commentary on Zephaniah* 1:6, PG 66:452D. Cf. L. van Rompay, 'Antiochene Biblical Interpretation: Greek and Syriac,' in J. Frishman and L. van Rompay (eds), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (Louvain, 1997), pp. 103–123.

tradition mediated by Greek Christianity in Syria, with the latter's influence eventually becoming dominant.

This book, divided into two parts, sums up our recent joint investigation of certain peculiar hybrid traits that can be discerned among late antique Christian and Jewish communities in Syria-Mesopotamia.[64] It goes without saying that we have not attempted to exhaust this wide and complex issue; we merely present here a number of case studies. Thus, Part One deals with Theodore of Mopsuestia as the prime representative of Syrian Greek Christianity with its multifaceted links to Syriac and Jewish traditions, primarily through the lens of his *Commentary on John*. This very special position as well as Theodore's subsequent paramount influence on East-Syrian Christianity – and the survival of a great deal of his writings in Syriac – warrants his central place in this study. We focus here on his works, which survived mainly in Syriac translation, and their seminal role in the formation of the so-called Antiochene tradition, as well as on the modes of their interaction with Jewish patterns of religious discourse and exegesis. We also elaborate on his contribution to the shaping of East Syrian Christian identity.

Chapter One outlines how Theodore's exegetical enterprise, engendered by the impetus to respond to the main theological crises of his generation, led him to further develop and modify the loose-union christological solution and the emphasis on the enhanced humanity of the assumed man. An instructive dialectic may be discerned in Theodore's enterprise, aimed at safeguarding the immutable divinity of the logos vis-à-vis the Arians – often branded by their enemies as Judaizers – which would, in turn, provide the seeds of contention for the fifth- and sixth-century christological disputes. It is in the context of these later disputes that the Interpreter would be anachronistically branded – together with other representatives of the Antiochene tradition – as a Nestorian and Judaizer.

Chapter Two highlights the centrality of Theodore's concept of progressive development in revelation and its comprehension as a core hermeneutical principle grounded in the Interpreter's

[64] See the Bibliography at the end of this volume.

theological outlook. That development-centered interpretation is applied in the *Commentary on John* to central issues in the Gospel narrative pertaining to the notions of sacred history and christology. Theodore maintains that even Jesus' disciples were not in fact ripe for the full apprehension of the divine truth of the incarnation to be achieved only after Jesus' resurrection. According to the Interpreter the content of this final enlightenment is not limited to Johannine christology but includes the kernel of Nicene and post-Nicene theology, as well as principal aspects of Theodore's Antiochene stance. Finally, Theodore's emphasis on progressive development finds its ultimate expression in his bold portrait of Christ's human development and gradual realization of the full potential of his conjunction with the logos. This most original and seemingly unprecedented idea demonstrates the work of Theodore's genius in service of the intra-Christian polemics of the period.

Chapter Three focuses on the implications of Theodore's christological notions for the general religious anthropology and soteriology espoused by the Interpreter, intrinsically connected with his uncommon pneumatology. Thus, Theodore transposes his model of Jesus' gradual enhancement to the soteriological trajectory of the disciples and believers in general. Moreover, he applies his christological terminology of conjunction also to the unity between the enhanced humanity of Christ and that of his followers. In the context of his polemic with the *pneumatomachoi*, Theodore strives to safeguard not only the consubstantiality of the Spirit but also its pivotal role in all crucial soteriological phases. Theodore's religious anthropology is generally characterized by the salient emphasis on the humanity of Christ as the actual soteriological medium and channel of humanity's conjunction with the divine.

Chapter Four investigates Theodore's strategies vis-à-vis Jews, which, though part and parcel of the general Christian preoccupation with the Jewish roots of Christianity, are informed by the Interpreter's peculiar christological and hermeneutical concerns. The primary focus here is on the function of the Jews in the Interpreter's overall theological construct of progressive revelation. The Interpreter legitimizes the law-abiding religiosity of the Jews within the context of their limited *praeparatio evangelica*. Moreover, Theodore posits the revelatory continuum and cognitive develop-

ment concerning christological truths, from the biblical past to Christ. According to Theodore, the deficient character of the biblical Jews' theological cognition is derived not from their unsatisfactory religious stance but rather from the objectively veiled nature of the revelation given to them. This attitude, not devoid of sympathy for 'Jewish cognitive limitations,' may be branded as mitigated supersessionism. The characteristic elements outlined in this chapter may reflect salient features of the Antiochene 'Greek way' in its underlying affinities with Syriac-speaking Christianity and its peculiar Jewish baggage, as represented especially by Aphrahat and Ephrem. This may also be part of the explanation for Theodore's outstanding reception by Eastern Syrian Christianity.

The discussion of Syrian Christianities' possible links to their coterminous Jewish culture, started in Part One, is the focus of Part Two that integrates the research conducted together with Reuven Kiperwasser. Here we offer a series of case studies addressing parallel strategies employed by Jewish and Syriac Christian sources vis-à-vis their common Mesopotamian cultural backdrop. We investigate the meaning of these parallels and offer some observations with regard to their possible function as respective identity markers.

Chapter Five thus deals with parallel apologetic strategies employed by the two minority groups, vis-à-vis the Sasanian Empire's dominant Zoroastrian elite, as attested in conversion narratives of Persians embracing Judaism or Christianity. This case study strongly indicates an underlying common pagan *topos* functioning in the context of religious initiation. The narratives further bear witness to the boundary-drawing strategies employed by the two minority groups to define their identity vis-à-vis a dominant culture commonly perceived as founded on orality. In both rabbinic and Syriac narratives the study of Scripture functions as a marker of the irreversibility of the spiritual and religious transformation. In contradistinction to the emphasis on oral tradition as an important identity marker in the late antique Jewish polemic with Christianity, our investigation shows that with Zoroastrians as the Other the Jewish identity-making strategy was different. Whereas, facing Christianity, Jewish self-perception embraces the self-image of an orality-oriented tradition, in interacting with Persian culture, it focuses – without completely

abandoning the importance of orality – on the written religious heritage. The Syriac initiation narrative, presenting an unabashedly anti-oral stance, provides an instructive backdrop to the mixed strategy employed in the rabbinic variant.

In Chapter Six we further develop a particular avenue of investigation, arguing that a comparative analysis of Jewish and Syriac material can lead to the unearthing of literary *topoi* of broader circulation – neither particularly Jewish nor Christian – adopted, and adapted, by both religious groups. We focus here on two examples, demonstrating the reciprocal potential of a comparative study of Syriac Christian and Babylonian rabbinic sources. In these cases, the investigation of the sources representing the two minority groups both highlights their different religious agendas and allows for restoring otherwise unattested patterns of their broader cultural – namely, 'pagan' Mesopotamian – backdrop with which they converse.

Chapter Seven addresses narrative strategies in the Syriac *Vita* of the fifth century monophysite Syrian monk Barsauma, recounting his pilgrimages to the Holy Land, analyzed vis-à-vis other Christian hagiographic stories as well as some rabbinic literary traditions. These strategies are employed in the context of the struggle for dominion over the Holy Land, Jerusalem in particular, against other contenders – Jews, Samaritans, pagans and discordant Christians. The *Vita* reflects a well-structured perception of the Jerusalem sacred geography, with the author being aware of rival Jewish claims for the city. This awareness provoked the author's response in the form of a foundational narrative of the expurgation of the Holy City from the Jewish Other. Rabbinic sources, surprisingly attest to a similar reticence vis-à-vis radical Jewish activism aspiring for mass pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. A comparison of responses from the two competing communities contributes to the mapping of identity-shaping strategies regarding the mental appropriation of the contested holy space.

PART 1
THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA AND THE GREEK-SYRIAC DIVIDE OF SYRIAN CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER ONE:
TRANSFORMED CHRISTOLOGY IN RESPONSE TO CRISES

INTRODUCTION

The theological and especially christological views of Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428) have been repeatedly addressed in research of the last half-century. In view of the fact that his major theological treatise *On the Incarnation* has been lost,[1] even greater importance for reconstructing Theodore's christology should be assigned to his understudied *Commentary on John* along with his *Catechetical Homilies*. In fact, as will become apparent, the extant Greek and Latin fragments of the *De incarnatione* correspond closely to Theodore's christology in the Commentary.[2]

[1] On Theodore's christology, see, e.g., Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*; P. Galtier, 'Theodore de Mopsueste: sa vraie pensé sur l'incarnation,' *Recherches de science religieuse* 45 (1957), pp. 161–186, 338–360; L. Abramowski, 'Zur Theologie Theodors von Mopsuestia,' *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschicte* 72 (1961), pp. 263–293; Norris, *Manhood and Christ*; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. I, pp. 421–442; F.G. McLeod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia* (London & New York, 2009), pp. 34–63. For the extant fragments of *On the Incarnation*, see T. Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De incarnatione. Überlieferung und Christologie der griechischen und lateinischen Fragmente einschließlich Textausgabe* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 234–291.

[2] For a synthesis of the christology reflected in the fragments of *De incarnatione*, see Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De incarnatione*, pp. 152–206.

Except for his short commentaries on the minor Pauline epistles, surviving in Latin,[3] the *Commentary* is the only work to have been fully preserved out of the numerous commentaries on almost the whole of the New Testament penned by Theodore, celebrated in the East Syrian tradition as The Interpreter (ܦܫܩܢܐ).[4] While a considerable amount of the *catenae* Greek fragments are extant, the text in its entirety survives only in Syriac translation,[5] which may account for the relatively scant scholarly attention it has received so far. A detailed study, however, was undertaken a few years ago by Felix Thome – with an emphasis on the textual aspects of the work.[6] Yet other aspects of the *Commentary* are clearly in need of further exploration, especially regarding its hermeneutics as an expression of Theodore's christological views.

Theodore's master, Diodore of Tarsus, had already laid down the main contours of what would become the characteristic 'Antiochene stance' on christology, especially the cardinal distinction between the logos (son of God) and the *homo assumptus* ('perfect man,' 'son of Mary,' 'the man,' 'son of David'). For

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[3] On Theodore's commentaries on the Pauline epistles, see U. Wickert, *Studien zu den Pauluscommentaren Theodors von Mopsuestia als Beitrag zum Verständnis der antiochenischen Theologie* (Berlin, 1962). See also recently R.A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles* (Atlanta, 2010).

[4] See Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Colossians*, ed. Greer, pp. 394–395.

[5] For the Syriac text, see ed. J.-M. Vosté, CSCO (Paris, 1940) (=*Comm.*). For an English translation see M. Conti, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Downers Grove, IL, 2010) (=Eng.). For the Greek fragments, see Devreese, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste*, pp. 305–419. For an English translation of the Greek fragments, see Kalantzis, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Of interest is Theodore's own statement that he will treat theological matters in the *Commentary* in a relatively concise way, referring the reader to his earlier work *On the Incarnation* (*Comm.*, p. 210, lines 28–29, Eng. p. 97 [=*Comm.* 210.28–29, Eng. 97], cf. 34.18–19, Eng. 16).

[6] F. Thome, *Studien zum Johanneskommentar des Theodor von Mopsuestia* (Bonn, 2008).

Diodore, Mary is the mother of a man who is conjoined to the logos and is deified because of this conjunction (*synapheia*). The incarnation is thus reduced to an indwelling of the logos because of Diodore's refusal to admit that human attributes can be predicated to the logos, which therefore cannot be called 'son of David.' The logos assumed flesh but did not *become* flesh. The consequence of this attempt to safeguard the divinity of the logos was that another ultimate subject had to be found for these human predicates. Thus Christ was essentially perceived as two entities loosely united via 'assumption,' 'clothing' or 'indwelling' – the typical Antiochene terminology. The difference between indwelling in Christ and in the prophets was only a matter of duration and degree. Diodore's stance, namely, his insistence on the complete humanity of Christ,[7] should be understood in the general context of Julianist, Arian and Apollinarian polemics.[8] Regrettably, the surviving fragments are insufficient for an adequate picture of Diodore's theology and hermeneutics.[9]

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[7] As noted in the introduction, Greek terminology and theological polemics notwithstanding, the basic underlying incarnation concept of the assumed man and the indwelling logos, the emphasis on Christ's humanity, and the devaluation and relativization of his divinity do not seem all that different from the crude christology of Aphrahat. In his exegesis, Diodore followed the rationalist interpretation of his teacher Eusebius of Emesa and insisted on a literal and historical method, strenuously opposing 'the old wives' tales of the allegorists' and not looking for a hidden meaning in the text (see *Commentary on Psalms* 6.1, ed. Olivier, *Commentarii in Psalmos*. In his partially recovered *Commentary on Psalms* he allows messianic relevance to only four Psalms (2, 8, 44, and 109; see Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier,* vol. 1, pp. 93-102). On Diodore's commentary on Psalms, see Rondeau, 'Le "Commentaire des Psaumes" de Diodore'; Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier*, vol. 1, pp. 93–102.

[8] See C. A. Beeley, 'The Early Christological Controversy: Apollinarius, Diodore, and Gregory Nazianzen,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011), pp. 376–407.

[9] On Diodore's theology, see Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 181–196; R. A. Greer, 'The Antiochene Christology of

Theodore of Mopsuestia would further refine the ideas of his master, endeavoring to combine the logos and 'the man' in a more adequate and elaborate concept of a loose unity and, most prominently, to expand the scope of applied hermeneutics. Thanks to him, our picture of Antiochene theology and hermeneutics is greatly enhanced.[10] Although the extent of Theodore's dependence on Diodore is sometimes difficult to assess, it is clear that for him too, the polemical context constituted a major axis and impetus for his theological elaborations. In his *Commentary on John*, Theodore himself points to some of the parameters underlying his exegetical strategies; most prominently, throughout the composition, the author stresses its polemical setting and its declared objective of refuting heresy – primarily, that of the Arians and the Apollinarians – paying special attention to verses in the gospel exploited by the heretics (ܗܪܛܩܣܝܣ).[11] This chapter will therefore focus on

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Diodore of Tarsus,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (1966), pp. 327–341; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 352–360. On Diodore's exegesis, see Schweizer, 'Diodor als Exeget'; Thome, *Historia contra Mythos*.

[10] On Theodore's theology, see also Norris, *Manhood and Christ*; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 421–439. On his hermeneutics, see also Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible*; Simonetti, '*Theodore of Mopsuestia*'.

[11] E.g., *Comm.* 3.7–10, 5.6–7, Eng. 1–2. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Philippians*, ed. Greer, pp. 322–323. For a discussion of Arianism, see T. Böhm, 'The Exegesis of Arius: Biblical Attitude and Systematic Formation,' in Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, pp. 687–705; T. Böhm, *Die Christologie des Arius. Dogmengeschichtliche Überlegungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Hellenisierungsfrage* (St. Ottilien, 1991); R.C. Gregg and D. E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia, 1981). R. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (Edinburgh, 1988); R. Williams, 'The Logic of Arianism,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983), pp. 56–81; C. Kannengiesser, 'Arius and the Arians,' *Theological Studies* 44 (1983), pp. 456–475; M.R. Barnes and D.H. Williams (eds), *Arianism after Arius* (Edinburgh, 1993). For anti-Arian arguments, see, e.g., *Comm.* 8–14, 18, 25, Eng. 5–12. For discussion of the anti-Arian polemics in the *Commentary*, see Thome, *Studien zum Johanneskommentar*, pp. 315–334.

Theodore's responses to these challenges and the ways in which they reshaped his theology and especially his christological thinking, as reflected mainly in the hermeneutical context of the *Commentary*.

THEOLOGY

Theodore's trinitarian ideas do not differ essentially from the Nicene outlook as developed in response to the Arian challenge throughout the fourth century. They have been amply studied, so we will relate to them only briefly, especially in regard to their polemical concerns, hermeneutical context and christological implications. In his commentary on the Johannine Prologue, Theodore addresses major Arian theological arguments – namely, that the logos was created; that it is not a truly divine hypostasis; and that it was created as a medium for the creation of the world and perhaps even exclusively of life. Against these doctrines, Theodore reestablishes that the logos was a divine hypostasis, coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, proceeding from him but not made by him, and whose existence is not a function of its role in the creation.[12] The evangelist wanted to show that 'the Son

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Theodore refers explicitly to the Arian Asterius who wrote a commentary on John, which is lost, and it appears that at least some of Theodore's allusions to the Arian interpretation of verses from John refer to that work. See *Comm.* 4.14–5.14, 210.16–25, Eng. 1, 96. He also refers to Eunomius (*Comm.* 3.7–13, Eng. 1). For Apollinarius and Apollinarianism, see H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule: Texte und Untersuchungen* (Tübingen, 1904); K.M. Spoerl, 'Apollinarian Christology and the Anti-Marcellan Tradition,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1994), pp. 545–568. See also D. Buda, 'Die soteriologischen Aspekte der anti-apollinarischen Polemik in den Katechetischen Homilien Theodors von Mopsuestia und in den Taufkatechesen des Johannes Chrysostomus,' in Th. Haintaler, F. Mali, G. Emmenegger, M. Lenkaityte Ostermann (eds), *Für uns und für unser Heil. Soteriologie in Ost und West. Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens* (Innsbruck and Vienna, 2014), pp. 37–50.

[12] *Comm.* 14.5–15, Eng. 6–7; 18.5–8, Eng. 8–9; 112.9–14, Eng. 52. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 1–3, ed. A. Mingana,

was always with the Father and that he is of the *same nature* (ܚܕܐ ܗܘ ܠܗ, ὅμοιος τὴν φύσιν) and *a partner* (ܫܘܬܦܐ, κοινωνός) *with him in creation*,' whose role was in no way limited to the creation of life.[13] According to our Interpreter, the evangelist further emphasizes that the Son 'has no communion [of nature] (ܫܘܬܦܢܐ, κοινωνία)' with the created things (ܒܪܝܬܐ).[14]

Theodore presents his arguments as an interpretation of the opening verses of the Gospel in what amounts to a discourse on the meaning of 'in the beginning' (John 1:1) and the unity of divine substance in philosophy and Scripture.[15] He thus rejects an Arian interpretation of John 1:1 as referring to the 'beginning' of the logos, claiming that in the Scripture 'the beginning' indicates something which is not preceded by anything else.[16] This instance is an example of Theodore's penchant for studying the meaning and usage of scriptural words and idioms to substantiate his hermeneutics. In a similar vein he argues that although elsewhere in the Scripture *meltha* (logos) does not necessarily mean hypostasis,

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Woodbrooke Studies 5 (Cambridge, 1932), 23/123–124, 30/132–133, 40/144–146. Theodore is aware that John's Prologue is an elaboration on the opening verses of Genesis and pits Genesis terminology – 'one day' and not 'first day' – against Arian interpretation of John 1:1. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* (ed. J. Theodor – C. Albeck; Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 3, 8–9, where the meaning of 'one day' in Gen 1:5 likewise does not mean 'the first day'. Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Philippians*, ed. Greer, pp. 314–315.

[13] *Comm.* 25.11–16, Eng. 12; 26.5–19, Eng. 2. Cf. Aphrahat, according to whom the world was not created via Christ (see S. Ruzer and A. Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies: Theology and Hermeneutics in Early Syriac Literature* [Leiden, 2010], pp. 12–16).

[14] *Comm.* 24.29–25.1, Eng. 12.

[15] *Comm.* 12.20–25, Eng. 6. Opening the commentary by discussing the various meanings of 'beginning' is structurally similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to Origen's opening of his commentary on John. See Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.90, ed. E. Preuschen (Berlin, 1903).

[16] *Comm.* 16.17–17.2, Eng. 8; 25.1–6, Eng. 12. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 3, Mingana 5.41/146–147.

here it clearly does.[17] Moreover, according to Theodore, the evangelist here intentionally avoids applying to the logos the appellation 'Son' in order not to mislead the reader with regard to his/its eternity.[18] For Theodore, not only John but also Paul, and in fact Jesus himself, expressed the same logos-theology balancing between the Scylla of Arian distinction and the Charybdis of monarchian Sabellianism, which is nothing but Theodore's own version of post-Nicene theology.[19] Theodore moreover relates polemically, albeit in passing, to the divine status of the Spirit, contested in his time by the so-called *pneumatomachoi* 'diminishing the person of the Spirit (ܡܚܙܝܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).'[20] The Interpreter thus asserts that the Spirit, being uncreated and unique, was not included among 'all things' – meaning both visible and invisible (ܟܠܗܝܢ ܕܢܠܐ ܟܠܗܝܢ) – made through the logos (John 1:3); it is united exclusively to the Father and the Son (ܒܝܕ ܠܐܒܐ ܘܒܪܗ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ).[21]

CHRISTOLOGY

Let us now further examine how Theodore's polemical context and post-Nicene responses inform his christological hermeneutics. Arian christology was viewed as posing three main difficulties: (a) a logos-*sarx* christology – admittedly not an exclusively Arian trait – where the logos is a created entity subject to change; substituting the human *nous* in Christ and thus denying full humanity to Christ

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[17] *Comm.* 21.3–8, Eng. 10.

[18] *Comm.* 18.4–10, Eng. 8. In a similar vein, Theodore asserts that the Scripture uses a variety of appropriate appellations to indicate divine nature, e.g. 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb 12:29). Cf. Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De incarnatione*, Frags. 23, 25, 31, pp. 249, 251, 253.

[19] *Comm.* 24.25ff, Eng. 11. Theodore appeals here to Heb 1:3. Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 2–3, Mingana 5.28–29/129–130, 36/140–141.

[20] In relation to John 16:12–14, *Comm.* 296.19–21, Eng. 136. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 1, 9 (Mingana 5.23–24/127–128, 100/219–221).

[21] *Comm.* 26.19–27.30, Eng. 12–13. Theodore further claims that the divine nature and essence of the Spirit were clearly acknowledged by the participants of the Nicene Council (see *Catechetical Homilies* 9, Mingana 5.96–97/220–221).

could impair the principle of 'what is not assumed is not saved (*quod non est assumptum, non est redemptum*);' (b) that the incarnation here is not, in fact, the true incarnation of a deity but only of a created, albeit heavenly, being; and (c) that the concept of a tight union between the logos and humanity in Christ raises the problem of their reciprocal influence and hence the possible transformation of both. These difficulties were compounded by the Apollinarian anti-Arian solution, according to which a divine, *non-created* logos was substituted for the human *nous* in a full-union incarnation.

In response to these challenges, Diodore of Tarsus emphasized the essential distinction between the logos and the *homo assumptus*, who is deified by reason of conjunction (*synapheia*) to the former. For Diodore, the logos assumed flesh but did not *become* flesh. Thus Christ was perceived as two entities loosely united via 'assumption.'[22] This dichotomy in turn was perceived as problematic, and it is here that Theodore, though generally following Diodore's scheme, aspired to a more adequate concept of conjunction, expressed in his elaborate idea of the 'dignity' of the assumed man as a divine power bestowed on him by the logos.

Theodore further develops his characteristic emphasis on the communication between the logos and the assumed man of the Messiah through a loose conjunction due to the difference of their natures, illustrated by the union of husband and wife.[23] With him, however, this conjunction is mediated and expressed through the dignity of the logos bestowed on and empowering the assumed man.[24] Through the conjunction with the logos, the assumed man also participates in the other divine persons, the Father and the

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[22] See Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 181–196; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 352–360.

[23] See *Catechetical Homilies* 8, Mingana 5.90/207; Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De Incarnatione*, Frags. 3, 12, pp. 236, 244.

[24] For these principles of Antiochene doctrine, see note 1, above. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 3, 8, Mingana 5.37, 51, 89–90; Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De incarnatione*, Frag. 6, 13, 28, pp. 239, 245, 252; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Colossians*, ed. Greer, pp. 372–373.

Spirit.[25] Through Christ, humanity will also share in this dignity.[26] Theodore is clearly motivated by the concern to repel the attempts of the Arians to violate the divine transcendence. He is always concerned not to confuse the godhead with the creature. As a result, the closeness of the conjunction of God and man is loosened. Vis-à-vis the Arians and Apollinarians, the synthesis between the immanence and transcendence of God in Christ and in humanity is to be such that both the divinity of the logos and the integrity of humanity in Christ are preserved.

The concepts of *prosopon* and *hypostasis* are somewhat played down in Theodore's writings, yet *prosopon* does play a special part in his understanding of Christ. Theodore rejects the logos-sarx model of incarnation found among his opponents and, following Didymus, votes for the logos-anthropos scheme, with an emphasis on Christ's human soul:

> The disciples of Arius and Eunomius say that he (Christ) took a body but not a soul (ܘܐܝܟ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܒܠ ܢܦܫܐ); the divine nature, they say, takes the place of the soul (ܐܠܐ ܡܟ ܢܦܫܐ ܐܠܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܡ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ). And they lower the divine nature of the Unique (Son) (ܡܫܬܒܚ) to the point (of saying) that he declines from his natural grandeur and performs the actions of the soul, by enclosing himself in the body and accomplishing everything to make it subsist (ܟܡܩܢܐ). Consequently, if the divinity takes the place of the soul (ܘܐܢ ܐܬܐ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܡܟ ܢܦܫܐ), it (i.e. the body) had neither hunger, nor thirst, nor was it tired, nor did it have need of food; for all this happens to the body because of its weakness (ܡܫܬܟܚ) and because the soul is not equipped to satisfy the needs which it has, save according to the law of the nature (ܟܡ ܕܢܦܫܐ) which God has given it.[27]

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[25] See Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De incarnatione*, Frag. 41, p. 257.

[26] Jansen, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: De incarnatione*, Frag. 7, p. 240.

[27] *Catechetical Homilies* (*Commentary on the Nicene Creed*) 5, Mingana 5.55; see also ed. R. Tonneau (Vatican, 1949); translation according to Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, p. 150. Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 3, Mingana 5.40–41.

Thus according to Arians, the logos is combined with the body in a vital unity. According to Theodore, however, such a symbiosis contradicts Christ's true nature. If Christ were hungry and thirsty, and suffered, it could be only because the functions of life are performed by the human soul. Both body and soul, then, had to be assumed to enable the death of the body and the sins of the soul. Thus Christ assumed a soul and by the grace of God brought it to immutability and to full dominion over the sufferings of the body.[28] The difference between this picture of Christ and that of the logos-sarx christology is clear. The human nature of Christ regains its real physical-human inner life and its capacity for action. The created soul provides the life for the body of Christ and is also the principle of the acts decisive for our redemption. Theodore demonstrates the activity of the assumed man against Apollinarius:

> Moreover (the divine Son) furnished his cooperation in the proposed works to the one who was assumed. Where does this (cooperation) entail that the deity had replaced the (human) nous (*sensus*) in him who was assumed? For it was not his wont to take the place of the nous… But suppose, as you would have it, that the deity took the role of the nous in him who was assumed. How was he affected with fear in his suffering? Why, in the face of immediate need, did he stand in want of vehement prayers – prayers which, as the blessed Paul says, he brought before God with a loud and clamorous voice and with many tears? How was he seized with immense fear that he gave forth fountains of sweat by reason of his great terror?[29]

Apollinarius and Theodore both agree that redemption is achieved through moral integrity, in the immutability of the spiritual principle in Christ. But while Apollinarius regards the logos as this principle, Theodore emphasizes the enhanced human soul of Christ.[30] The human is the victor over sin and death, albeit only

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[28] Ibid. 5.14. See also *De Incarnatione* Frag. 7, ed. Jansen, p. 241.

[29] H.B. Swete, *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii* (Cambridge, 1880), vol. 2, p. 315; Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, p. 204.

[30] Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, pp. 186–189.

with God's grace. The redeeming sacrifice of Christ is now seen as an act of his 'human decision.'[31] When the complete humanity of Christ is thus emphasized, it is only logical that the distinction of his natures and the question of their unity have to be stressed.[32] This loose union christology adheres to a single subject in Christ; but the two complete natures seem to be united only superficially through 'one *prosopon*' produced by the logos, not as an essential one but as a prosopon of 'dignity', and given to the assumed man.[33] This is apparently the channel for infusing humanity with 'dignity.' In other words, this conjunction is not a combination of the two natures to form a new one but rather an equality of dignity now shared by Christ's human nature and the hypostasis of the logos. Christ's *prosopon* is thus the ultimate expression of the close conjunction between his humanity and the hypostasis of the logos.[34] It is also the channel through which grace operates in the spiritual development of the assumed man and his soteriological powers and acts.

Theodore's hermeneutical endeavor provided a fitting opportunity for contextualizing his ideas. Thus Theodore applies his version of mitigated logos-anthropos loose-union christology to the Gospel of John's narrative, promulgating the idiosyncratic distinction between the 'two modes' of speech and action by Christ – those expressing the divine nature of the logos in him, and those indicating the exclusively human nature of the *homo assumptus*. The Interpreter asserts that the second mode is always employed when addressing Christ's enemies or when referring to his human weakness, whereas the first mode is employed in Christ's words

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[31] *Catechetical Homilies* 15, ed. Mignana 6.79–80.

[32] Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 11.2. This distinction of natures is further exemplified in Theodore's statement that at the time of Jesus' death the logos is separated from the assumed man yet 'remains close to him' (*Catechetical Homilies* 8, Mingana 5.87).

[33] See Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, pp. 228–229.

[34] On Theodore's concept of *prosopon*, see also *De Incarnatione* Frags. 6, 12, ed. Jansen, pp. 239, 244; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2.2, p. 433.

and actions indicating the divine greatness.[35] This distinction pertains also, according to Theodore, to the words of John the Baptist and the narrative of John the Evangelist regarding Christ. In this sense, the Prologue stands out, as here the words of John the Evangelist – which Theodore limits to John 1:1–14 – speak exclusively of the divine logos 'not diminish[ing] the Lord in any way.'[36] The incarnation is correspondingly explained away through the terminology of indwelling ('and the Word became flesh' equals 'and dwelt among us').[37]

This interpretation is explicitly presented as part of the anti-Arian polemic: Some opponents, apparently Arians, claim that 'became' means that he has thus changed. Theodore likewise rejects what he describes as the majority view – namely, that the logos indeed *became man*. According to him, therefore, the evangelist explains the matter sufficiently by adding 'and dwelt among us' as an explanation for 'and the Word became flesh' – for further discussion of the matter, the Interpreter refers his audience to his *De Incarnatione* (ܬܓܫܡܐ ܘܫܟܢ ܒܢܝܢ).[38]

In his determination to dispel the notion of a full-blooded incarnation, Theodore further elaborates that 'the Word became flesh' means nothing more than that this was the erroneous opinion of 'those who saw him' – namely, he was believed to be 'only a man' because of his appearance. He indeed became flesh only in the sense that he dwelt in a human nature. Theodore characteristically refers here to 2 Cor 5:4, where the human body is called a tabernacle, a dwelling place (ܕܗܢܐ ܡܫܟܢܐ ܕܝܢ). He notes

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[35] *Comm.* 11.17–19, Eng. 5, cf. *De Incarnatione* Frags. 18, 21, 26, 30, ed. Jansen, pp. 247–248, 251–253. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Ephesians*, ed. Greer, pp. 192–193; 208–209; 246–249; *Philippians*, pp. 316–317; 320–321; *Colossians*, pp. 386–389.

[36] *Comm.* 11.13–17, Eng. 5. Cf. *De Incarnatione*, Frag. 18, ed. Jansen, p. 247.

[37] *Comm.* 33.16–34.16, Eng. 16. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Colossians*, ed. Greer, pp. 380–381.

[38] *Comm.* 34.17–19, Eng. 16. See *De Incarnatione*, Frags. 14, 16, ed. Jansen, pp. 245–246.

that in Scripture, 'flesh' equals the whole human being (our nature) – therefore here too by saying 'became flesh,' the evangelist in fact intended 'became human.' But again, 'becoming' does not mean change but only the perception by others.[39]

In this context, Theodore also rejects the concept current in early Christian thought according to which the logos, which conveys the will of God, had been revealed personally to the righteous (ܐܢܫ ܛܝܒ) – namely, patriarchs and prophets – in the biblical past in quasi-angelic form. Theodore regards this idea as unacceptable, associating it with contemporary heretical, primarily Arian, views. In fact, these views were entertained by such prominent early Christian writers as Justin, Irenaeus, Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea.[40] There is, indeed, nothing peculiarly Arian about this view; but having been strongly advocated by Eusebius in the 4th century, it might have been regarded as smacking of Arianism. According to Theodore, it is only in the incarnation that the logos was revealed hypostatically, and seen, whereas, earlier, God's words – also denoted as *meltha* (ܡܠܬܐ, logos), albeit in a non-hypostatic sense – were conveyed through angelic intermediaries.[41] He thus invokes John 1:18 ('No one has ever seen God') as proof that the logos had never been directly 'seen' before the incarnation.[42] Theodore further interprets John 1:9–10 as

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[39] *Comm.* 33.16–34.3, Eng. 16. See Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 229–230.

[40] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56, ed. E.J. Goodspeed (Göttingen, 1914); Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8, 4.5.2–3, 4.7.2–4, 4.9.1, 4.10.1, ed. A. Rousseau – L. Doutreleau – B. Hemmerdinger – C. Mercier, SC 100 (Paris, 1965–1982), pp. 152f., 210f., 263f., 293f.; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eclogae Propheticae* 1.3, PG 22; *Historia Ecclesiastica.* 1.2.7–8, ed. E. Schwartz, GCS 2/1–3 (Leipzig, 1903–1908); *Demonstratio Evangelica* 5.9.8, ed. I.A. Heikel, GCS 6 (Leipzig, 1913). See also S. Pines, *God, Glory and Angels According to a Second-Century Theology*, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 6 (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 1–14. It may be worthy of notice that this motif is absent in Aphrahat's writings; see Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, p. 16.

[41] *Comm.*18–19, Eng. 9.

[42] *Comm.* 42.29–43.6, Eng. 20.

distinguishing between the logos' manifestation in the flesh ('was coming into the world') and his omnipresence in the world even before that when 'according to his *hypostasis and his nature* (ܥܡ ܗܘ ܒܟܝܢܐ ... ܒܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܗܘ, τῇ γὰρ ὑποστάσῃ ... καὶ τῇ φύσει)… he was in the world.'[43]

Unlike his approach to the Prologue, in the bulk of the commentary Theodore consistently applies his modified two-mode loose-union christology to the Gospel narrative. A characteristic example may be found in his interpretation of John the Baptist's saying 'After me comes a man who was made (=ranks) before me, for he was before me' (John 1:30). According to Theodore, it would be redundant to claim the superiority of the pre-existent divine logos over the Baptist, as commonly held; therefore it should rather be understood as referring to Christ's humanity (ܐܢܫܘܬܐ). In other words, Jesus was more powerful than John even in his human nature with its acquired superior dignity (ܝܩܪܐ ܘܫܘܒܚܐ), in which he was elevated over all creatures thanks to his conjunction with the logos (ܒܚܕ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܝܬܗ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܟܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ).[44] The *Commentary* leaves no doubt that the application of John's words to the assumed man (ܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܐܬܝ ܒܬܪܝ) is tailored to annul the Arian claim that this is a proof-text for their idea that the logos itself was created or generated: 'It is necessary again to refute the cunningness of the heretics who take the words, "after me came" and "was made (=created) before me" as referring to the divine hypostasis (ܥܠ ܩܢܘܡܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ).'[45]

Theodore further interprets the title 'son of God' in the Baptist's declaration 'And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God' (John 1:34) as *not referring* to the divine nature (ܐܠܗܘܬܐ) revealed by the logos' divine generation, but *to*

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[43] *Comm.* 18.20–30–19.4, Eng. p. 9; 32.3–13, Eng. 15. See also L. Fatica, 'Il commento di Teodoro di Mopsuestia a Giovanni, 1, 1–18,' *Koinonia* 13 (1989), pp. 65–78.

[44] *Comm.* 43.24–44.20, Eng. p. 21. The word ܚܒܪܐ expresses the idea of conjunction or connection of the two natures in Christ without intermingling. See also *De Incarnatione* Frags. 6, 24, 34, ed. Jansen, pp. 239, 250, 254.

[45] *Comm.* 43.27–30, Eng. 21.

Jesus' *enhanced human nature* because of the *conjunction* of that nature with the logos, the only begotten (ܝܚܝܕܝܐ).[46] This interpretation, further enhanced elsewhere in the *Commentary*, anticipates a widespread understanding in modern New Testament scholarship.[47] Theodore anchors his interpretation in what he sees as the historical context of the idiom – namely, the traditional meaning of the 'son of God' title according to the putative usage of Jesus' Jewish milieu: 'Nathanael said that he [Jesus] was the *son of God* not because he knew about his divine birth (ܒܪ ܐܠܗܐ), but because it was *a familiar way of saying things*, since those who by their own *moral virtue drew near to God were called sons of God* (ܘܟܕ ܡܩܪܒ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܡܕܡ ܛܒ̈ܬܐ ܗܘ̈ܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡ̈ܪ ܐ̈ܢܫ̈ܐ ܕܒܢ̈ܝ ܐܠܗܐ ܐ̈ܢܘܢ ܗ̈ܘ̈ܐ ܕܩܪ̈ܝܒ̈ܝܢ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܛܒ̈ܬܐ ܗ̈ܘ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܬܩܪ̈ܝ ܒܢ̈ܝ ܐܠܗܐ).'[48] Yet Theodore never loses sight of the anti-Arian agenda with its necessity to highlight the 'true divine sonship' of the logos. He therefore has to balance this idea with his peculiar version of loose-union christology by claiming that the assumed man 'through his conjunction with God the logos (ܒܚܝܕܘܬܗ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܘܓܘܣ ܗ̇ܘ), by means of the spirit (ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ), participated in a

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[46] *Comm.* 47. 12–16, Eng. p. 22. Cf. *De Incarnatione* Frags. 23–25, ed. Jansen, pp. 249–251; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles: Ephesians*, ed. Greer, pp. 182–183.

[47] See, for example, D. Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 113–123. In *De Incarnatione* (Frag. 23, ed. Jansen, p. 250) Theodore further specifies that the son of God title, applied to the *homo assumptus*, had, in fact, been shared by many biblical figures who received sonship by grace.

[48] *Comm.* 53.18–22, Eng. 25. Cf. the habitual Jewish exegesis of the 'sons of God' in Gen 6:4 (e.g., in the Aramaic Targum) as 'sons of the chosen elite'. See also Flusser, *Jesus*, pp. 113–123. Theodore also explains the rhetorical question by Nathanael 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' (John 1:46) by suggesting – seemingly on the basis of 'the Galilee of the Gentiles' in Isa 9:1–2; Matt 4:15 – that the village was at that time much despised by the Jews because its inhabitants were mostly gentiles (ܡܢ ܚܕ̈ܪ̈ܐ, ὑπ' ἐθνικῶν) (*Comm.* 52.1–5, Eng. 24). See also *Comm.* 83.11–13, Eng. 39, where Theodore emphasizes that now, 'after he had talked about the divine nature (ܥܠ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ), the Baptist turned his attention to the *human nature* (ܥܠ ܐ̈ܢܫ̈ܐ).'

true sonship (ܒܢܝܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܫܪܪܐ).'[49] This participation, however, is termed by the Interpreter as 'adoptive sonship (ܒܢܝܢ ܕܣܒܪ).'[50]

Theodore likewise views the proclamation 'From his fullness (ܡܢ ܡܠܝܘܬܗ) we have all received' (John 1:16), which he interprets as the words pronounced by the Baptist and only reported by the evangelist, as indicating that we have all received the grace of the spirit (ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ) through Christ's humanity (ܐܢܫܘܬܐ) enriched by the 'dignity of the nature' (ܝܩܪܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ) bestowed on him through the conjunction with the logos.[51] Thus, according to the Interpreter, John the Baptist 'had perceived the truth about the *human nature* of our Lord; in other words, that it had received *universal dominion* only (ܒܫܘܠܛܢ ܟܠ) *through the power of the Spirit*.'[52] Theodore thus presents John the Baptist as proclaiming the truth about the upgraded human nature of Christ – hence the division of the Prologue between the declaration by the evangelist speaking of the logos (John 1:1–14) and the declaration by the Baptist (John 1:15–18). Likewise, the Interpreter ascertains that the heavenly voice of the Synoptic tradition proclaiming 'this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased' (Matt 3:17 and par.) addresses the enhanced (hence 'beloved') humanity of Christ. This is a didactic stratagem adapted to Jewish biblical notions of sonship – as found, for example, in Isa 1:2 and Ps 82:6.[53]

Jesus himself is portrayed as constantly aware of the presence of the logos; nevertheless he mostly speaks as the assumed man, only rarely referring to the divine nature of the indwelling logos. Occasionally Theodore inserts into his running commentary indications regarding the guidelines of his exegetical functional division. Thus, commenting on John 5:22 ('The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son'), the Interpreter states that this cannot possibly pertain to the divine nature of Christ

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[49] *Comm.* 37–38, Eng. 18.

[50] *Comm.* 39.26–28, Eng. 19. Cf. *De Incarnatione* Frag. 23, ed. Jansen, p. 249.

[51] *Comm.* 37–38, Eng. 18. Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 6, Mingana 5.64–65.

[52] *Comm.* 83. 26–29, Eng. 39. Cf. *De Incarnatione* Frag. 6, ed. Jansen, p. 239.

[53] *Comm.* 124.17–125.2, Eng. 57–58.

'since the logos… does everything like the Father.'[54] According to Theodore, this assignment of judiciary powers to the humanity of Christ fits his human nature well, since it is necessary for the judge to be seen (ܘܡܠܐ ܒܝ ܪܘܚ ܐܢܫܐ), whereas the divine nature is unseen (ܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܐܠܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܠܚܘܕܘ).[55] Following the same logic, the passage in Acts 1:11 ('This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven') could refer only to the man who has been assumed – and will come down from heaven – and not to the ubiquitous logos, who is never separated from the Father.[56] However, it is clear for Theodore that the assumed man (ܐܢܫܐ ܕܐܬܐܚܕ) receives this omnipotent (ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܟܠ) judiciary power, as well as the power of resurrection, only thanks to his conjunction with the logos: 'This (John 5:30: "I can do nothing on my own") refers to his human nature (ܕܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ) because it can do nothing on its own if it is removed (ܕܐܢ ܡܢ) from its conjunction from God the logos.'[57] He further specifies that when the human nature judges, the divine nature is with it in order to lend it credibility because of its inherent weakness (ܕܟܠ ܡܐ ܕܐܢܫܐ ܒܠܚܘܕܘ ܡܣܬܟܠ).[58] Thus when Jesus says: 'The Father knows me and I know the Father' (John 10:15), he is referring to his human nature (ܐܢܫܐ) – since it is self-evident that the logos has full knowledge of the Father and therefore redundant to state it. It is the humanity of Christ that through conjunction with God the logos is enabled to gain knowledge of the Father.[59] In a similar vein, Theodore interprets Jesus' appeal to God to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41–42) as coming from the assumed man

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[54] *Comm.* 116.1–7, Eng. 54.

[55] *Comm.* 116.8–10, Eng. 54. See also *Comm.* 167.1–4, Eng. 77: 'The purpose of what is said is that the divinity of the Only Begotten does not judge the world (ܕܠܐ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܝܠܝܕܐ ܒܠܚܘܕܘ ܡܕܝܢ) because God the logos is invisible to humanity similarly to the Father (ܐܝܟ ܕ ܐܒܐ ܕܟܠ ܐܢܫ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܗܘ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܐܒ ܐܘ ܕܡܬܚܙܐ).'

[56] *Comm.* 116.24–28, Eng. 54.

[57] *Comm.* 118.27–119.1, Eng. 55; 121.15–18, Eng. 56.

[58] *Comm.* 168.12–169.2, Eng. 78.

[59] *Comm.* 204.7–13, Eng. 93. Cf. *De Incarnatione* Frag. 41, ed. Jansen, p. 157.

as, 'It is abundantly clear that God the logos would never need (ܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܠܡܠܬܐ, ἀπρεπὲς γὰρ τῷ Θεῷ Λόγῳ) to make a request through prayer to obtain power to raise the dead.'[60] Jesus' humility (ܡܟܝܟܘܬܐ, ταπεινοφροσύνη) is interpreted also as highlighting the integrity of his humanity even in its enhanced condition: 'The human being of our Lord (ܒܢܝܢܫܐ ܕܡܪܢ) – for he is the one who washed the feet [of the disciples] – his mind did not become arrogant because of his dignity (ܠܐ ܐܬܪܡܝ ܒܗ ܒܪܝܫܗ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ, οὐκ ἐφυσιώθη).'[61]

The polemical context of the emphasis on the human subject of Jesus' sayings and acts comes to the fore in Theodore's comments on the assumed man's soul, which is intrinsically connected to the issue of Jesus' passion. This is elaborated upon, inter alia, in the commentary section relating to John 10:16–18. Here, the Interpreter attacks head-on the *logos-sarx* christology of Apollinarians (and possibly Arians), which preempts the full humanity of the Messiah and, hence, the voluntary nature of his suffering and atoning death: 'Heretics… do not accept that our Lord assumed a [human] soul (ܕܢܦܫܐ ܐܬܚܕ ܡܢܢ), whereas our Lord… talks in detail (ܡܫܟܚ) of his soul.'[62] Theodore refers here, most pointedly, to John 10:17: 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my soul, and I may take it again.' It is clear, then, that it was not the divine nature but the human one that spoke here about the *human* soul. It is this human soul that when the right time comes 'voluntarily accepts death (ܒܙܒܢܗ ܡܩܒܠ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܒܪܝܫܐ)' and suffering.[63] Further on, commenting on John 13:1 ('Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world'), the Interpreter claims that John intended that Jesus undergo his passion knowingly and voluntarily (ܠܐ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܒܛܥܝܘܬ ܐܠܐ ܒܪܝܫ ܘܒܪܨܘܢܗ ܕܐܬܐ... ܠܐ, οὔτε ἀγνοῶν, οὔτε ἄκων ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὸ πάθος). In other words, he was not forced to suffer. Moreover, the

[60] *Comm.* 229.17–20, Eng. 105.

[61] *Comm.* 255.5–14, Eng. 117.

[62] *Comm.* 209.5–7, Eng. 96. See also *De Incarnatione* Frag. 44, ed. Jansen, p. 259.

[63] *Comm.* 205.25–27, Eng. 94.

man Jesus 'knew exactly the time of his passion (ܒܗ ܗܘܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܚܡܐ ܘܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ) and everything that would happen to him.'[64]

Theodore, then, often refers to the enhanced human nature of the assumed man, polemically emphasizing its distinction from the logos-anthropos christology. He seems, however, to limit those occurrences when Jesus' acts and sayings are exclusively ascribed to the divine nature to a relatively few cases where exegetical exigencies demand it. For example, in the various places where Jesus' words or acts presuppose similarity or even equality with the Father, as in John 14:11 ('I am in the Father and the Father in me'), it must be understood as referring to the indwelling divine nature: 'He is pointing to the likeness of [his] *divine nature* (ܐܠܗܝܘܬܐ ܘܐܠܗܐ) with that of the Father. The assumed man could not be said to be like God the Father (ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܬܕܡܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܘܠܐ ܠܐܒܐ).'[65] It is between the divine incarnate logos and the Father that the Interpreter discerns their perfect likeness as described by Theodore's Jesus: 'You should know that there is a perfect conjunction/affinity of our natures, ideas and power (ܕܬܕܥ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܒܝܢ ܟܝܢܘܬܢ ܘܒܝܢ ܡܕܥܐ ܘܒܝܢ ܚܝܠܐ, γίνωσκε τοσαύτην οὖσαν τῆς φύσεως καὶ τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως τὴν συνάφειαν) so that there is no difference in our words either.'[66] This insistence on the logos' equality and unanimity of will is presented explicitly as a response to a polemical challenge: '(These words) demonstrate his/its (the logos') equality with the Father and do not separate the one from the other in any way, as they [the heretics] maintain.'[67] It is also an exegetical exigency that prompts Theodore's somewhat forced interpretation of Jesus' saying in John 6:62 about '[the Son of Man ascending to] *where he was before*' as referring to the divine logos – dwelling in the human Son of Man – who *eternally resides* in heaven 'and who brought him (Jesus) up there.'[68]

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[64] *Comm.*253.18–23, Eng. 116.

[65] *Comm.* 270.17–19, Eng. 124.

[66] *Comm.* 269.11–13, 268. 20–21, Eng. 123. See also *Comm.* 302.23–29, Eng. 140.

[67] *Comm.* 112.10–12, Eng. 52.

[68] *Comm.* 152.9–13, Eng. 70.

One more telling example is provided by the story of healing the paralytic (John 5:2–17). Unlike, for example, the tradition in Luke 13:10–17, where Jesus offers quasi-halakhic arguments for his healing on the Sabbath, here Theodore seems to advocate the view that indeed humans in general, the assumed man included, are subject to Sabbath prohibitions without concessions backed by casuistic reasoning. In fact, it is God's angels who are allowed to act on the Sabbath, according to the divine command. However, Theodore's Jesus does not resort to such a justification for his act – which presupposes a supplication on behalf of the paralytic, answered by God through his healing angels, and not a direct act of healing – but rather opts for a clear-cut argument grounded in God's own omnipotence and superiority over his own law. According to Theodore's logic, the notion of equality with the Father assumes that no one else but the consubstantial logos has the same authority to act on the Sabbath for our salvation: 'There is no commandment or law that would prevent him from doing whatever he wants.'[69]

The relative rarity of what is interpreted as Jesus' direct references to the divine nature in him is in line with Theodore's perception of the cognitive deficiency of Jesus' audience – Jews in general as well as the disciples – which prevents them from grasping the divine nature residing in him.[70] Jesus therefore only seldom hints at this divine nature, so that the disciples will eventually understand what he meant and then come to possess perfect knowledge (ܝܕܥܬܐ ܫܠܡܬܐ), which at that stage was still hidden from their minds.[71]

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[69] *Comm.* 103.17–105.4, Eng. 48.

[70] See also *De Incarnatione* Frag. 1, ed. Jansen, p. 233; for further discussion, see Chapter Two ('Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ').

[71] *Comm.* 269.23–270.5, Eng. 124. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 8, Mingana 5.83–84. Cf. *Comm.* 138.2–8, Eng. 64, where, according to the Interpreter, replying to the accusations by the Jews (John 5:9–47), Jesus limited himself to a subtle allusion to his dignity and his divinity because otherwise they would never have believed what he had to say about his human weakness.

Theodore's distinction between the 'two voices' in Christ is further exemplified in his juxtaposition of the two and the transition between them in various contexts where such juxtaposition allows for coping with an exegetical constraint in accordance with his general hermeneutical approach. Thus, commenting on the dynamic of Jesus' speech in the course of the paralytic episode, the Interpreter states that Jesus, being at first 'rightly accused as a man of violating the Sabbath,' switches to speaking about the greatness of the divine nature and then afterwards, coming to deal with the issue of judgment and dominion delegated by God to the human Son, 'in good order… turned the discussion back to his human nature.' According to Theodore, Jesus indicates here 'the distinct natures with distinct words (حمهسكها وهكةهم هحبم حلا هةوهما وحتنا),' and the Interpreter as usual justifies the fluctuations as a didactic stratagem: Even if at that time neither the Jews nor the disciples were capable of grasping the divine nature of Christ, it was necessary to encode the message so that they would in due time be able to decipher it.[72] To this category belongs also the explanation about Jesus' invoking the divine nature in John 14:10 ('I do not speak on my own authority') as an encoded message that will eventually help the disciples overcome the trauma of the crucifixion: 'It is not all that surprising that when he prepared for suffering and had already said many things as a man, he proceeded to speak about things suitable to divinity. It had to be said to the disciples so that later they would eventually understand what he meant and then come to possess perfect knowledge.'[73]

Indeed, Theodore recognizes that certain words, such as the personal pronoun 'I/me', are employed for both voices, human and divine; yet he claims that in such cases they are accompanied by distinct qualifiers signaling their distinct natures and the fluctuations between them:

> When he spoke about his humanity and his divinity, he referred the pronoun 'I' to the common *prosopon* (هةهاه) حب حلا

[72] *Comm.* 113.24–114.5, Eng. 52–53. See also *Comm.* 167.5–12, Eng. 77.

[73] *Comm.* 269.24–30, Eng. 124.

ܘܠܡܚܘܝ ܕܠܐ ܒܟܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܡܕܡ ܚܕ ܘܒܗ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ ܗܘ ܐܠܐ ܫܢܝ ܫܡܗ ܕܐܡܪ ܒܗ

unequivocally, 'Both phrases cannot be attributed simultaneously to one of those natures… [it] would be inappropriate.'[78]

Another illuminating example is provided by Jesus' use of the title 'son of man' (ܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ, ܗܘ ܐܢܫܐ ܘܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ) in John 12:23, where Theodore sees a reference 'to *the man* who before the cross bore all the characteristics of humanity (ܒܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܒܫܪܐ ܐܢܫܐ ܗܘ), but after the resurrection and ascension… is worshiped by all creatures because of his conjunction with God the logos (ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܕܩܝܡ ܡܢ ܡܝܬܐ ܘܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܡܫܬܘܕܐ ܗܘ ܒܡܚܘܬ ܠܘܓܘܣ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܕܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܒܫܪܐ ܐܬܝܠܕ ܡܢ ܡܪܝܡ ܒܬܘܠܬܐ).'[79] Granted that Theodore was well aware of the heavenly Son-of-man figure of Daniel 7, the Interpreter seems to imply that Jesus intentionally adopted this title because its dual meaning, as both human and heavenly, allowed it to be consecutively suited to both the pre- and the post-resurrection stages of the revelatory process.

Sometimes Theodore indicates explicitly hermeneutical guidelines regarding Jesus' 'shift of voices'. Thus the Interpreter observes that when the Gospel text relates things that concern the humanity of Christ, but the subject matter is more elevated than the human nature under discussion – namely, the enhanced human nature of the assumed man – it requires an immediate invocation of the mediated divine greatness (ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܘܫܘܠܛܢܐ). This shift of voices is also perceived as a didactic stratagem 'rendering the discussion beyond doubt for the hearers.'[80] Inversely, it is claimed that often '[from] the things that belong to the divine nature, he [Christ] …intentionally switched the discussion toward his human nature, in order to demonstrate that it had received

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[78] *Comm.* 303.27–304.7, Eng. 140. One may note that, this consistent tendency notwithstanding, at least in one case the distinction seems somewhat mitigated by attributing a double meaning to the same saying in John 8:14 ('Where I have come from and where I am going'): 'He was making known the *honor of his humanity* and dimly also *alluding to his divinity* (ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܢ ܕܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܐܢܫܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܐܬܝܠܕ ܠܐ ܒܪܘܫ ܕܡ)' (*Comm.* 165.15–18, Eng. 76).

[79] *Comm.* 240.7–12, Eng. 110, cf. *De Incarnatione* Frag. 23, ed. Jansen, p. 252.

[80] *Comm.* 115.8–12, Eng. 53.

supernatural qualities from the [divine] nature (ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ... ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܘܡܬܚܫܒ ܠܗ ܐܦ ܟܕ)' by virtue of 'conjunction with God the logos (ܒܚܘܫܒܢܗ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ).'[81]

THE HERMENEUTICS OF LOOSE-UNION CHRISTOLOGY

In the *Commentary*, the main features of Theodore's loose-union christology – succinctly expressed by the distinction between the two voices in Christ – indeed appear in the exegetical context of the treatise, albeit in a concise and unelaborated manner, as Theodore himself explains, referring the reader to his work *On the Incarnation* for a more extensive treatment.[82] The conceptual framework of the conjunction of natures is established by the particular usage of the term *prosopon* as defining the medium of the union. Thus, commenting on John 14:10–13, the Interpreter clarifies:

> He (Jesus) speaks about himself as about a single being (ܐܡܪ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܗ ܐܝܟ ܥܠ ܚܕ ܐܢܫ). He thus reveals the conjunction of the *prosopon* (ܡܫܝܡ ܠܢ ܒܚܘܫܒܢܐ ܕܦܪܨܘܦܐ). If this were not true, there would be no honor (ܝܩܪܐ) for him who was assumed (ܕܐܬܢܣܒ), since he evidently has a part in everything (ܕܫܘܬܦ ܗܘ ܒܟܠ) because of the one who dwells in him (ܒܓܢܝܢܗ ܕܫܪܐ ܒܗ).[83]

We may note here how the phrase 'conjunction of the *prosopon*' essentially means conjunction of natures *in the prosopon*. Elsewhere, Theodore reiterates his position that the two voices represent the two *distinct* natures, stressing that Jesus' words indicate only a quasi-unity of the natures – signifying, in fact, the prosopic union: 'By mentioning those two things (the distinct natures) *as though* speaking about one (ܐܝܟ ܥܠ ܚܕ ܐܢܫ ܘܐܡܪ), he signified the unity

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[81] *Comm.* 115.15–18, 24–29, Eng. 53. See also *Comm.* 126.27–127.1, Eng. 59, where the authority and power to act on the Sabbath is explained as delegated by the logos to the assumed man through his acquired dignity. Cf. *De Incarnatione* Frags. 28, 31, ed. Jansen, pp. 252–253.

[82] *Comm.* 210.28–29, English 97, cf. *Comm.* 34.18–19, Eng. 16.

[83] *Comm.* 271.18–22, Eng. 125, see also *De Incarnatione* Frag. 28, ed. Jansen, p. 252.

of the *prosopon* (ܦܘܓܢܐ ܚܕܐ).'[84] One can thus see that having introduced the term 'union (ܚܕܘܬܐ)' here – in contradistinction to the usual 'conjunction' – he immediately qualifies it as only a quasi-union. Once we understand the loose character of the prosopic union, it can also be referred to as an 'inseparable conjunction (ܚܒܝܪܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܦܪܫܢܝܬܐ).'[85]

The conjunction of natures (ܚܒܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ) mediated by the *prosopon* forms the channel for what Theodore calls the 'proper communion (ܫܘܬܦܢܐ ܕܝܠܝܢ)' and 'unanimity of will (ܚܕ ܨܒܝܢܐ ܘܚܕ ܪܥܝܢܐ, τοῦ βουλήματος ἡ ταυτότης).'[86] It is instructive that for the purpose of clarifying his loose-union christology, Theodore invokes here the authority of Paul in Romans 7:21–25, where the union of soul (*nous*) and body (*soma*, *sarx*) in fact presupposes a *conflict* of distinct natures: 'I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind… I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.'[87] The application of this well-known simile speaking of the psychosomatic union to the logos-anthropos further exemplifies the looseness of the prosopic conjunction: Since he (Paul) was discussing two natures and two different entities and yet was speaking about a single subject, it was most appropriate for him to use the pronoun 'I/me' with each of the two different natures. Indeed he is talking about his own *prosopon*, which possesses both of these elements because of the conjunction of body and soul (ܒ ܘܟܠ ܐܢܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܕܒܬܪ ܕܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܢܫܐ ܐܠܐ ܐܢܐ ܒܦܪܫ ܕܒܪ ܐܢܫ ܗܘ ܕܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܢܫܐ

ܘܐܢܐ ܒܟ ܐܬܚܕ ܥܡ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥܘ ܠܝ ܘܐܬܚܫܒ ܐܢܐ ܒܗ ܕܐܢܫ ܗܘ ܠܟܠ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥܘ ܠܝ ܘܒܗ ܥܒܕܬ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܠܦܪܩܢ ܕܟܠ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܘܐܢܐ ܐܬܚܕ ܒܗ ܕܐܙܕܘܓ ܠܗ ܠܐܒܐ).[88]

The looseness of the conjunction of natures is further illustrated by statements to the effect that 'because of the conjunction of the natures they reached a *certain unity* (ܥܠ ܕܐܬܚܕ ܒܗ ܘܥܕ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܘܐܢܫܘܬܐ),' as well as by the language of 'assumption' and 'indwelling': 'I (the logos) was in the man (ܒܐܢܫܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܝ) and was considered to be a man by those who did not know me. Through him I did everything for the salvation of the human race, and *I assumed him* so that I might join him to the Father (ܘܐܢܐ ܐܬܚܕ ܒܗ ܕܐܙܕܘܓ ܠܗ ܠܐܒܐ).'[89]

The prosopic union enables the influx of divine dignity into the assumed man without annulling the humanity of Christ but, rather, enhancing it. This enhancement conditioned by the looseness of the conjunction, results in abilities that are beyond ordinary human capacity. Such an understanding safeguards, albeit somewhat paradoxically, the full humanity of Christ in the incarnation. One of the salient expressions of this acquired dignity is the power to perform miracles transcending the laws of nature, of which the ultimate example is the ability to 'take up his soul by returning it to his body' in the resurrection.[90] The acquired dominion,[91] as well as the mental and cognitive powers, far exceeding the usual human wisdom, constitute another feature of the enhanced humanity.[92] Another effect of the bestowed dignity is that the death of the assumed man would be qualitatively superior, in that he accepted it voluntarily when he wished to and that he had foreknowledge that his death would be 'short-lived (ܘܥܒܪ ܗܘ ܠܡܘܬܐ) and… when his soul returns to his body, he would have an

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[88] *Comm.* 167.12–30, Eng. 77. Cf. *De Incarnatione* Frag. 44, ed. Jansen, p. 259.

[89] *Comm.* 304.11–16, Eng. 140. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles*: *Ephesians*, ed. Greer, pp. 182–183.

[90] *Comm.* 208.25–209.4, Eng. 96. See also *Comm.* 205.26–206.2, Eng. 94; 270.19–21, Eng. 124.

[91] *Comm.* 113.19–22, Eng. 52.

[92] *Comm.* 209.1–3, Eng. 96. See also *De Incarnatione* Frags. 2, 24, 29, ed. Jansen, pp. 234, 250, 252.

imperishable and immortal life (ܚܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܚ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܠܦ).'[93] The superior, albeit still human, cognitive powers are emphasized against Apollinarian and Arian christologies denying a human soul in Christ.[94] Generally speaking, through this received dignity, the assumed man 'was made a participant of this honor (ܝܩܪܐ) together with the Father.'[95]

CONCLUSION

This chapter shows how Theodore's exegetical enterprise, engendered by the impetus to respond to the main theological crises of his generation, led him to further develop and modify the loose-union christology solution inherited from his master, Diodore, applying it in the hermeneutical context of his detailed *Commentary on John*. The Gospel narrative furnishes the opportunity to highlight and elaborate on the loose-union christology and the enhanced humanity of the assumed man through the prosopic conjunction of dignity. In fact, the *Commentary* corroborates Theodore's statement regarding the consistency of its christology with that of his earlier treatise *On the Incarnation*, at least according to its extant Greek and Latin fragments. Moreover, it provides many details and nuances, unattested in his other surviving works.

One observes here an instructive dialectic: Theodore's endeavor, which aimed at safeguarding the immutable divinity of the logos vis-à-vis the Arians – sometimes branded by their enemies as Judaizers[96] – thus producing a definitive closure to the main theological schism of the first century of Christian dominion would, in turn, provide the seeds of contention for the fifth-century christological disputes. It is in the context of those later disputes that the Interpreter would be anachronistically branded –

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[93] *Comm.* 205.24–206.2, Eng. 94.

[94] *Comm.* 209.5–6, Eng. 96.

[95] *Comm.* 117.17–18, Eng. 54. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 8, Mingana 5.84.

[96] See A. Le Boulluec, 'Arius judaizans? Crise de mutation et signe de séparation?' in S. Mimouni and B. Pouderon (eds), *La croisée des chemins revisitée. Quand l'Eglise et la Synagogue se sont-elles distinguées ?* (Paris 2012), pp. 299–320.

together with other diphysites, especially of the Antiochene School – as a Nestorian and Judaizer.[97] Theodore's views on Jews and Judaism, in the context of his general christological stance, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

[97] See, e.g., J. Behr, *The Case against Diodore and Theodore: Texts and Their Contexts* (Oxford, 2011). On Theodore's stance on Jews and Judaism, see A. Kofsky and S. Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Jews and Judaism: Mitigated Supersessionism in Christological and Hermeneutical Context,' *Revue des Études Juives* 174 (2015), pp. 279–294.

CHAPTER TWO:
PROGRESSIVE REVELATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN CHRIST

An uninterrupted comprehensive reading of Theodore's *Commentary on John* reveals the treatise' salient feature, the Interpreter's perception of a gradual – possibly didactically motivated – development in unfolding *christological* truths to Jesus' followers. Moreover, in Theodore, this concept of 'progressive revelation' appears not to be limited to this issue but to run as a guiding principle throughout his *Commentary* in the elaboration on various key trajectories imparting divine knowledge throughout the history of salvation. The discussion in this chapter aims at examining this hermeneutical stratagem and its identity-shaping function, in turn applied to pre-incarnation sacred history, to the apostles and disciples' cognitive development, to contemporaneous Jewry and, finally, to the gradual development of Jesus' divinely enhanced humanity.

FROM BIBLICAL PAST TO INCARNATION

In contrast to a concept current in early Christian thought, according to which the logos had been revealed personally to the righteous (ܙܕܝܩܐ) – namely, patriarchs and prophets – in the biblical past in quasi-angelic form, Theodore regards this idea as unacceptable and seems to associate it with contemporary heretical, primarily Arian, views. In fact, as we emphasized in Chapter One, such views were entertained by such prominent early Greek

Christian writers as Justin, Irenaeus, Origen and Eusebius.[1] As already noted, according to Theodore, it is only in the incarnation that the logos was revealed hypostatically, and seen, whereas, earlier, God's words – also denoted as *meltha* (ܡܠܬܐ, logos), albeit in a non-hypostatic sense – were conveyed through angelic intermediaries.[2] The Interpreter refers to John 1:18 ('No one has ever seen God') as a proof that the logos had never been directly 'seen' before the incarnation.[3] Theodore further interprets John 1:9–10 as distinguishing between the logos' manifestation in the flesh ('was coming into the world') and his omnipresence in the world even before that 'according to his *hypostasis and his nature* (ܒܟܝܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܘ ... ܒܦܘܪܨܘܦܗ ܘܒܟܝܢܘܬܗ, τῇ γὰρ ὑποστάσῃ ... καὶ τῇ φύσει') ('he was in the world').[4]

Theodore moreover claims that the notion of serial pre-incarnation appearances of the logos was common among John's Jewish contemporaries. What clearly underlies Theodore's polemical strategy here is his apprehension that such a position potentially jeopardizes the revelatory uniqueness of the incarnation event by relativizing the divine manifestation in the humanity of Christ. It stands to reason that Theodore may have identified the Christian concept he rejects here as rooted in Late Antique Judaism, where it prevented the Jews from accepting the revelation

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[1] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56, ed. E. J. Goodspeed (Göttingen, 1914); Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8, 4.5.2–3, 4.7.2–4, 4.9.1, 4.10.1, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, B. Hemmerdinger, C. Mercier, SC 100, 152f., 210f., 263f., 293f. (Paris, 1965–1982); Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.37, 6.17, ed. Preuschen; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eclogae Propheticae* 1.3, PG 22; *Hist. Eccl.* 1.2.7–8, ed. E. Schwartz, GCS 2/1–3 (Leipzig, 1903–1908); *Demonstratio Evangelica* 5.9.8, ed. I. A. Heikel, GCS 6 (Leipzig, 1913). See also S. Pines, 'God, Glory and Angels According to a Second-Century Theology,' *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987), pp. 1–14. It may be worthy of notice that this motif is absent in Aphrahat's writings, see Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, p. 16.

[2] *Comm.*18–19, Eng. 9.

[3] *Comm.* 42.29–43.6, Eng. 20.

[4] *Comm.* 32.3–13, Eng. 15. See also L. Fatica, 'Il commento di Teodoro di Mopsuestia a Giovanni, 1, 1–18,' *Koinonia* 13 (1989), pp. 65–78.

in incarnation and recognizing its unique character.[5] This could definitely have contributed to Theodore's staunch opposition to this view.

Nevertheless, in his polemic Theodore retains the basic perception of the logos as the voice proclaiming God's will (ܩܠܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܢ ܘܡܬܓܠܝ ܠܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܠܒܢܝ ܐܕܡ) and, in fact as God's intermediary in his dealings with the world and humanity.[6] Theodore thus confirms that the logos had conveyed its messages to ancient Israel, albeit in an indirect way, which in turn informs his perception of the revelatory development from the biblical past to Christ. It seems that Theodore ascribes a similar indirectness to even the famous angelic vision of Isaiah 6, where, according to him, the prophet is able to perceive only the glory (ܫܘܒܚܐ, δόξα) of the triune deity, whereas the divine nature remains incomprehensible (ܠܐ ܡܬܝܕܥ ܐܠܐ ܠܡܪܝܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܐܠܐ ܒܫܘܒܚܐ).[7] The circuitous character of the revelation in the past prevented Israel from 'recognizing its Lord (ܕܠܐ ܐܬܝܕܥ ܠܡܪܗ, τὸν οἰκεῖον δηςπότην).'[8] Though Theodore takes for granted the primordial hypostatic existence of the logos, he may retain here an earlier restrictive concept of the pre-incarnation logos as the voice and message of God as notably expressed by the early fourth century Aphrahat.[9]

THE DISCIPLES' LONG ROAD TO UNDERSTANDING

Though the incarnation is regarded by Theodore as a direct personal revelation of the logos in humanity and a watershed in the unfolding history of salvation, he recognizes that even Jesus' disciples were not actually ready for the full apprehension of the divine truth of the incarnation due to their deficient conceptual preparation. Theodore's awareness is obviously informed by the

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[5] See discussion in D. Boyarin, *Sparks of the Logos: Essays in Rabbinic Hermeneutics* (Leiden, 2003); D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004).

[6] *Comm.* 18.20–21, Eng. 9.

[7] *Comm.* 248.10–17, Eng. 114.

[8] *Comm.* 32.14–15, Eng. 15.

[9] See Ruzer & Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 10–11.

Gospel narrative with its inherent dynamic and tension, resulting in his model of the disciples' gradual enlightenment.

The *Commentary* provides many examples of the disciples' cognitive deficiency. Theodore describes their mode of thinking during Jesus' lifetime as 'a human way' (ܐܝܟ ܒܢܝܫܐ ܕܒܣܠ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܕܐ).[10] They commonly addressed him as an admirable man (ܓܒܪܐ ܫܦܝܪ) who performed many wonders through his superior powers (ܡܫܝܚܘܬܐ). But Theodore insists that before the crucifixion they did not have a proper understanding of Christ as 'God the logos' (ܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܐ).[11] Thus, for instance, faced with Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13–19), they believed that by driving away the sellers of cattle and sheep he had abolished the market, whereas had they recognized the incarnate logos they would have realized that what they were witnessing was in fact a new phase in salvation history and that Jesus' act 'in truth… meant that the sacrifices of dumb animals (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܒܗܡܬܐ) were to be abolished.'[12]

A rather blatant example is found in the Interpreter's claim, relating to the disciples' shock at Jesus' words in John 6:58, that they completely misunderstood the symbolic nature of the Eucharist established by their Master. They were capable of grasping that the bread – in a manner similar to but superior to the manna – received from the Father what it did not initially have in its nature and therefore gives others the possibility of actually participating in the logos. However, since Jesus identified himself with that bread, they, thinking in human terms, interpreted this as relating to eating Jesus' physical body – hence their dismay. But Jesus, in fact, had alluded to his indwelling divine nature, in other

[10] *Comm.* 221.23–24, Eng. 102.

[11] *Comm.* 224.16–21, Eng. 103. See also *Comm.* 226.15–18, Eng. 104; 238.15–16, Eng. 109.

[12] *Comm.* 61.29–62.1, Eng. 29. This is an illuminating example of how despite his clearly stated hermeneutic preference he retains his basic propensity for literal, historically contextualized interpretation, ascribing it here to the unaware disciples.

words, to symbolically consuming the logos. The proper symbolical understanding will be achieved only after the resurrection.[13]

In light of the disciples' inbred incapacity, Jesus is presented as one who reveals to them only partial knowledge of his powers – hinting at his 'secret omniscience (وسرا سكه ببد صلا حصا حه)' – to gradually (هدا هعزا) prepare them for eventual comprehension of his divine nature.[14] It may be seen as part of a broader strategy by Jesus, to avoid public exposure of his divinity: 'Though it would have been appropriate (حسعا) for him to be acknowledged as God… he nonetheless protected himself' from this impression.[15] An illuminating example, quoted above, is provided by Jesus' use of the title 'Son of Man' (حذ ابعا, حزه وابعا) in John 12:23, where Theodore sees a reference 'to *the man* who before the cross bore all the characteristics of humanity (وهبم رحسا حكهم اتعملا هحلا), but after the resurrection and ascension… is worshiped by all creatures because of his conjunction with God the logos (هج حلؤ وبم هعملا ههحكما وحصما هلهلا بعصداه وحدا لكها هحلا هج هعملا حكهم حزتلا هعملهبم).'[16] Our interpreter, clearly aware of the heavenly son-of-man figure of Daniel 7, seems to imply that Jesus intentionally adopted this title because its dual meaning, as both

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[13] *Comm.* 151, Eng. 70. Theodore's stance on the Eucharist will be further addressed in Chapter 3. This may imply a polemic stance against literal understanding of the Eucharist. On Theodore's Eucharistic views in the *Commentary on John*, see X. Ducros, 'L'eucharistie chez Théodore de Mopsueste d'après son commentaire sur l'évangile selon saint Jean,' *Actes du XXIe congrès international des orientalistes*, *Paris* 23–31 *juillet 1948* (Paris, 1949), pp. 366–367. See also R. Brändle, 'Eucharistie und christliches Leben bei Johannes Chrysostomos und Theodor von Mopsuestia' (forthcoming). For a similar Eucharistic polemic, see Ruzer & Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 69–72.

[14] *Comm.* 52.15–20, Eng. 25; 273.30–274.1, Eng. 126.

[15] *Comm.* 100.29–101.5, Eng. 47. Theodore's notion here may very well have been informed by the inherent logic of the gospel narrative, the so-called Messianic secret, which modern scholarship discerns especially in Mark. See, e.g. W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge, 1971).

[16] *Comm.* 240.7–12, Eng. 110.

human and heavenly, suited both pre- and post-resurrection stages of the revelatory process. Another example in a similar vein is the treatment of John 16:28 ('I *came from* the Father'): according to the interpretation suggested in the *Commentary*, Jesus uses these words in deference 'to the human opinion about him (ܗܘ ܕܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܥܠ ܝܫܘܥ ܗܘ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܕܒܪ ܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ),' which considered him as only a human messenger of God though actually the speaker here, who is the logos dwelling in him, could not be separated from his *communion* (ܫܘܬܦܐ) with the Father.[17]

Jesus conceals the divine nature hidden within him because it is *necessary for the plan of salvation* (ܡܛܠ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܬܓܠܝ ܠܟܠ ܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܐܢܐ): 'My time will come when I will clearly make known in front of everyone who I am (ܐܬܐ ܙܒܢܗ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܠܟܠ ܡܢ ܕܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܠܟܠ ܥܠܡ ܐܬܐ ܙܒܢܗ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܠܟܠ ܡܢ ܕܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܠܟܠ ܥܠܡ).' This refers to Jesus' resurrection and the events following it.[18] Jesus is also portrayed as one who first demonstrates his powers in acts and only then explicates certain elements of his teachings – another didactically motivated strategy based on a psychological truism.[19]

According to Theodore, Jesus in the Gospel, within this general didactic approach, applies also a complementing tactic of introducing throughout his ministry and until its very end indications that, though unintelligible at the time, would be preserved by the tradition and eventually be deciphered by the disciples in light of his resurrection.[20] Theodore further specifies that Jesus related *allegorically* (ܒܡܬܠܐ) the things he said about himself (ܕܐܡܪ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܗ ܗܘ ܕܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ), especially those that would happen later – such as the resurrection, ascension and second coming – and would only then be properly understood (ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܡܬܠܐ ... ܘܒܗ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܠܡܫܝܚ

before the end.[22] Similarly, such natural phenomena as the earthquake and the sun's eclipse (brought forth by the logos) will be grasped as pointing to the true identity of the crucified one only after the resurrection.[23] John 14:6–7 ('If you had known me, you would have known my Father also') prompts Theodore to further specify that, in fact, at that point, the disciples, too, like Judaism as a whole, did not have accurate knowledge of the Father as well (لا حصر محمحتم حصر).[24]

Thus the final phase of enlightenment comes after Jesus' resurrection. Yet full enlightenment does not occur instantaneously; it, too, is distinguished by a gradual development. In a programmatic statement Theodore highlights the key events signaling the advance of the disciples' apprehension on the way to christological *gnosis*, two of which characteristically belong to the post-resurrection time: 'Three times grace was given to the disciples who believed: in the mission to the gentiles, after the resurrection and at Pentecost (محمحزا وحا حصقا محمز صمحا محمحقصمحمحه).'[25]

Within this general outlook, Theodore emphasizes the novelty of the post-resurrection understanding granted to the disciples vis-à-vis their earlier cognitive deficiency: 'The disciples understood nothing of what happened before his resurrection (ولا مبم مح امحم وممحمحتم ممم صمحا مبم صمحا ممم احصبزا)… but only received such *grace of true comprehension* (محمحا...وحابه محمح ابحمحا مبحا, ἔτυχον χάριτος ... ὡς πάντα τρανῶς εἰδέναι) after his resurrection.'[26] This post-resurrection enlightenment would be mediated – in reference to Jesus' words on the future guidance of the Spirit (John 16:13) and the traditional narrative of the descent of the Spirit in Acts 2 – through the Holy Spirit.[27] Granted that the Spirit had been instrumental in the disciples' partial christological

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[22] *Comm.* 242–243, Eng. 111. Cf. 258.30–259.2, Eng. 119 ('I foretell *the facts before the event* so that, *when they happen*, *you will know who I am*.')

[23] *Comm.* 261.21–29, Eng. 120; 308.16–19, Eng. 142.

[24] *Comm.* 267.27–30, Eng. 123.

[25] *Comm.* 358.12–14, Eng. 166 (commenting on John 20:29).

[26] *Comm.* 238.14–24, Eng. 109.

[27] *Comm.* 273.8–9, Eng. 125 (commenting on John 14:16–17).

comprehension during Jesus' lifetime, Theodore asserts its crucial role in their final doctrinal enlightenment not 'through speech but communicating to their souls the revelation of the doctrine through an ineffable mystery (ܐܠܐ ܐܬܬܐ ܠܢܦܫܬܗܘܢ ܐܦ ܒܡܠܐ ܐܠܐ ܒܓܠܝܐ ܕܬܘܕܝܬܐ ܕܒܪܙܐ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܐܡܪ ܘܠܐ ܐܬܝܕܥ ܐܠܐ ܒܙܒܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܠܗܘܢ ܒܪܙܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܒܝܕ ܐܢܫ ܠܡܐ ܕܐܬܝܕܥ ܐܠܐ ܒܓܠܝ

of the Messiah through a loose conjunction due to the difference of natures. This conjunction is mediated and expressed through the dignity of the logos bestowed on and empowering the assumed man.[32] Therefore, the disciples' enlightenment was not limited to Nicene trinitarian doctrine but further included chief aspects of Theodore's Antiochene stance.[33] It is this full theological enlightenment that transforms the humanity of the disciples, endowing them with supernatural power (ܣܠܛܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ) and eternal life (ܚܝܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ, ζωὴν αἰώνιον).[34]

On the other hand, even the post-resurrection enlightenment is presented as gradual, its first stages still characterized by the disciples' incomplete knowledge. Thus Theodore emphatically claims not only that the apostles did not know Christ perfectly before his resurrection; even after the resurrection they still had their doubts about it (ܘܐܦܠܐ ܗܟܝܬܢܐ ܣܠܩ ܥܡ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܝܘܡ ܩܝܡܬܗ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܩܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܚܙܝ ܠܗ ܐܦ ܗܟܝܬܢܐ ܕܐܬܚܙܝ ܠܗ

who had just touched the body of Jesus and *had not yet been taught* that the risen one was divine, to call the latter 'God.' Therefore, when Thomas, the 'doubting disciple' exclaimed: 'My Lord and my God,' he was merely praising God for the miracle of Jesus' bodily resurrection.[36]

THE UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL OF THE JEWS

The Gospel of John is distinguished by frequent references to Jews, without attention to the internal divisions of contemporary Jewish society characteristic of the Synoptic narrative. For Theodore, these Jews often represent the pre-incarnation stage of revelation, a kind of *praeparatio evangelica* that constituted a matrix common to the Jews in general, including the circle of Jesus' disciples. Theodore thus shows a keen awareness of the Jewish matrix of the nascent Jesus movement and ascribes to it a crucial importance for understanding the disciples' conduct and beliefs as anchored in the social and religious reality of their time. One may say that in this Theodore anticipates modern scholarly approaches.[37] Such an understanding informs Theodore's definition of both the initial post-incarnation overlap between the disciples and the Jews at large in their Messianic expectations, and of the eventual Christ-centered cognitive *quantum leap* that would distinguish between the two groups.

The author claims, *inter alia*, that while the Jews were privy to the virtue of loving kindness as based on the Torah, Jesus' followers exhibited a superior true loving kindness, expressed in the remission of sins. Similarly, whereas the Jews did have a promise of resurrection given by the logos (ܡܠܬܐ), only with Jesus' rising from the dead were the believers 'adopted (ܫܪܝܪܐ ܒܢܝܐ),' receiving a 'sure promise of the resurrection (ܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ)… in action through the power of the Spirit (ܒܥܡܠ ܪܘܚܐ

[36] *Comm.* 358.3–11, Eng. 166. Interestingly enough, this exegetical dichotomy still persists in modern scholarly exegesis.

[37] Cf. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible*, pp. 6, 179.

ܫܡܝܐ).'[38] Jews also entertained elaborate messianic expectations, even if only partially correct, grounded in biblical revelatory tradition. They were aware that Elijah precedes the advent of the eschatological prophet and the Messiah, though they did not realize (a) that Elijah was supposed to come only just before the *second coming*; and (b) that the eschatological prophet and the Messiah would be one and the same person. This is how Theodore tries to solve the exegetical conundrum in John 1:25, where John the Baptist is said to be 'neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet'.[39]

Moreover, Jews, as exemplified in John 1:49 by Nathanael, representing here 'common Israel,' thought about the Messiah as 'someone more intimate with God than anyone else (ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܟܠ ܫܪܝܪ ܠܐܠܗܐ, ὡς οἰκειωμένου παρὰ πάντας Θεῷ),' and they expressed it by using the title 'son of God,' yet they interpreted it in a 'fairly obscure and carnal way (ܒܣܝܡ ܕܡܛܠ ܒܣܝܡ, ἀμυδρότερον καὶ σωματικώτερον).'[40] This is a good example of the combination of positive assessment of the intermediary *praeparatio evangelica* and critical evaluation of its incompleteness commonly applied by Theodore both to the disciples and to contemporaneous Jews at large. Theodore explicitly states elsewhere, commenting on John 7:34 that Jews *and* disciples at this stage belong to the same epistemological category:

> The Jews did not understand any of these words. And this is not surprising, because even the *disciples*… could not understand the words that were said at that time. It was only at the end that they learned these things from the facts. (ܗܘ ܒܣܝܡ ܕܐܦ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܐ ܠܐ ܐܬܝܕܥ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܕܐܦ ܠܗܘ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܐ ܠܐ ܐܬܝܕܥ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܕܐܦ ܠܗܘ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܐ

[38] *Comm.* 35.3–17, Eng. 17; cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 12, Mingana 6.19. See Ferraro, *L'esposizione dei testi pneumatologoci*, pp. 265–295.

[39] *Comm.* 41.5–24, Eng. 20. Cf. recently R. Nir, 'The Identity of John the Baptist as Elijah: Aspects of a Christian Tradition,' *Cathedra* 139 (2011), pp. 55–78.

[40] *Comm.* 53.9–15, Eng. 25; cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 13, Mingana 6.40. See also *De Incarnatione*, Frag. 1, ed. Jansen, p. 233.

ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܝ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܗ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܐܦ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܒܫܪܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܒܫܪܐ ܕܐܝܬ

draws an explicit parallel between the Jews in general and the members of Jesus' entourage with regard to their understanding:

> Even though the Jews could not understand these topics at the time, he nonetheless spoke about them, so that later they might consult (ܢܣܬܟܠ) this book (i.e., John's Gospel). The disciples, at the time, did not understand many of the things he said either. But later, when they recalled (ܐܬܕܟܪܘ) his words, they understood their meaning.[47]

These insertions mainly pertain to the co-existence and distinction of the human and divine natures in Christ and their respective actions and predicates. They may take the form of subtle allusions, as those Theodore discerns in John 8:14; 5:9–47 and 8:16.[48]

To sum up, there is a clear overlap between the appraisal of the disciples' pre-Easter epistemic limitations and that of the Jews. That, combined with Theodore's generally positive appreciation of the Jewish *praeparatio evangelica*,[49] reflects a stance of what may be called mitigated supersessionism, which also conveys a modicum of understanding of the Jews' immanent inability to grasp the Messiah's nature. We shall return to Theodore's stance on Jews and Judaism in Chapter Four.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Within Theodore's general scheme of progressive enlightenment, the figure of John the Baptist clearly stands out, constituting a special case. Building upon the traditional perception of the Baptist as the forerunner, Theodore promotes him as a herald of christological truths still hidden from the disciples and the rest of the Jews – namely, as one who recognizes both the enhanced

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[47] *Comm.* 113.29–114.5, Eng. 53.

[48] *Comm.* 165.16–18, Eng. 76; cf. ibid. 167.11–12, Eng. 77; *Comm.* 138.2–8, Eng. 64; 113.24–29, Eng. 52; ibid. 166.16–19, Eng. 77; cf. ibid. 165.14–18, 25–27, Eng. 76; ibid. 251.3–7, Eng. 115.

[49] Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles*: *Ephesians*, ed. Greer, pp. 82–85.

human nature and the divine nature in Christ.[50] This perception is seemingly conditioned by Theodore's idiosyncratic – though already forcefully proposed by Origen – reading of the ending of the christological prologue (John 1:16–18) as proclaimed by the Baptist himself and only registered by the evangelist.[51] Correspondingly, in the commentary to John 1:6–10, the Baptist is portrayed as not only a witness to the 'true light' but as himself a 'lamp shining in the darkness.'[52] What in fact distinguishes this from the later outpouring of the true light of Christ is not so much the content of its message but rather its temporary and limited nature: 'For a short time he (John) acted as a lamp shining in the darkness (ܚܕ ܙܒܢ ܐܚܪ... ܗܢܝܐ ܘܡܫܬܥ ܫܥܬܐ, τοῦτο δὲ λύχνου ἔργον πρόσκαιρον μὲν φαίνοντος)… and for few people since he only preached to Jews.'[53] The Baptist thus plays the distinctive role of potentially advancing the preparatory disposition of the Jews and, in a sense, provides for Theodore a missing link between their restricted messianic lore and the divinized christology of Jesus. Moreover, Theodore's enhancement of John's cognitive awareness as a temporary light affects a certain relativization of Christ's revelatory mission.

The crucial need to interpret the Gospel story, where John the Baptist initially features prominently but then disappears, may account both for his elevated stature in Theodore and for the fact that his potential is not further developed in the *Commentary*. He

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[50] *Comm.* 82–83, Eng. 38–39. Theodore emphasizes that the Baptist's choice of Jesus from among the multitude of repentant Jews was based on 'objective enlightenment' and not on his kinship with Jesus. It is to that end that John had from childhood been segregated in the wilderness and had no contact with his relatives – to avoid any suspicion of nepotism (*Comm.* 45.1–4, Eng. 21).

[51] See Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.213, ed. Preuschen. This is one of six direct testimonies of the Baptist himself in the Gospel identified by Origen.

[52] Cf. Origen's notion of the Baptist as an angelic incarnation of sorts (*Commentary on John* 2.186–187, 2.192, ed. Preuschen).

[53] *Comm.* 31, Eng. 15. Cf. Fatica, 'Il commento di Teodoro di Mopsuestia a Giovanni, 1, 1–18,' pp. 65–78.

remains for Theodore an enhanced prophetic figure, exceeding his generation in his mental capacities. In the final account, however, his christological preaching constitutes something of a blind alley. At the same time, he signals a new phase in human cognitive development, one that anticipates Theodore's concept of development in the humanity of Christ himself.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN CHRIST

The consequence of the aspiration to safeguard the divinity of the logos within the anti-Arian context was that another ultimate subject had to be found for the human predicates of Christ related to in the Gospel account. Thus, the loose-union model employed for this end had to be complemented through its specific implementation in the idea of the human development of the *homo assumptus*, leaving the logos unaffected and unchanged by the processes undergone by Christ's dignity-enhanced humanity. Consequently, the framework of gradual progress characterizing Theodore's historical hermeneutics is finally epitomized in his concept of Jesus' own biographical development.

The quasi-scholastic question of the precise moment of the incarnation, namely, the union between the logos and humanity, remained undetermined in the christological discourse for a long time after Theodore, as is clearly witnessed, for example, by Philoxenus of Mabbug's discussion of the topic in the early sixth century.[54] Theodore seems to distinguish between the pre-union and post-union phases following Mary's impregnation. While during the former the logos is present, but no union is as yet effected, in the latter – taking place at a certain undefined moment of the pregnancy or at the very moment of birth – the union comes about through the mediation of the Spirit. This motif of the Spirit as the active agent in the incarnation is a traditional feature derived from its prominent place in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. Theodore's adaptation of this motif to the claim for the existence of a pre-union stage can be understood in the context of

[54] Philoxenus of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 4, p. 9, 17, p. 42. See Ruzer & Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, p. 131.

his overall loose-union christology and viewed as a residual form of adoptionism of sorts applied to the early period of the pregnancy: 'Christ-in-the-flesh, when he was not yet in his nature – namely, conjoined with God the Word – necessarily needed the mediation of the giving of the Spirit (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܥܕܠ ܒܟܝܢܬܗ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܬܚܕ ܥܡ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܨܒܝܢ ܠܡܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).'[55]

This developmental pattern continues also after the incarnation, where Theodore discerns two consecutive operational modes of the logos on the humanity in Christ – potential and effective. This is clearly dictated by Theodore's insistence on the full humanity as the subject of development in Christ, which had to be emphasized against Arian and Apollinarian views.[56] He applies the first mode, when the empowerment by the logos is not yet active, to the period between the incarnation and Jesus' anointment by the Spirit at baptism. This seems to be the background for Theodore's fierce rejection of apocryphal stories of Jesus' childhood miracles in the Infancy Gospels: 'It is certainly foolish (ܫܠܝܐ) to believe that any of those events reported about our Lord during his childhood (ܕܝܠܕܘܬܗ) ever happened.'[57]

The second, effective, mode is initiated by the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, explicitly marked by Theodore as conferring the additional grace of empowerment: 'The descent of the Spirit (ܢܚܬܬ ܪܘܚܐ) was not useless even for him (Christ) with regard to

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[55] *Comm.* 296.26–29, Eng. 137.

[56] *Comm.* 33–34, Eng. 16. See also R. Lorenz, 'Die Christusseele im Arianischen Streit. Nebst einigen Bemerkungen zur Quellenkritik des Arius und zur Glaubwürdigkeit des Athanasius,' *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschicte* 94 (1983), pp. 1–51.

[57] *Comm.* 59.3–12, Eng. 28. It seems, however, that in his earlier *De Incarnatione* (Frags. 7–8, 11, pp. 240–243) Theodore subscribed to the slightly more conventional view that the human mental and moral development of Jesus between the incarnation and baptism was accelerated under the influence of the logos compared to other humans. Yet this development admittedly remains limited compared to the post-baptism phase.

the conferring of grace (ܡܬܩܒܠ ܒܗ ܛܘܒܬܐ).'[58] This grace sets in motion Jesus' public ministry, miraculous powers and moral perfection newly acquired by his enhanced humanity: 'After receiving every perfect grace (ܡܢ ܟܠ ܛܘܒܬܐ ܡܫܬܠܡܬ ܠܗ), which he received thanks to his anointing (ܡܫܝܚܘܬܐ), he lived a life of great integrity (ܒܫܠܡܘܬ ܚܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܠܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ) in a way that is not possible for human nature (ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܠܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ ܕܠܐ ܟܕ ܐܢܫ ܗܘ ܒܛܒܝܥܬܗ).'[59] Resembling what Augustine would claim with regard to humanity in general, Theodore presupposes regarding Christ a need for an additional influx of God's grace in order to achieve moral perfection.[60] Theodore thus appears to advocate a notion of development in Christ's human nature reaching its perfection in the anointment by the Spirit, which becomes, in effect, the crowning stage of the incarnation. This enhanced human nature, however, is no longer an ordinary human nature – it now participates in the divine goodness (ܒܛܝܒܘܬ ܐܠܗܝܬ ܕܒܪ) on behalf of all humanity that will 'participate in all the things that happened to him.'[61] This future stage of humanity is described as a 'natural conjunction' (ܚܒܪܘܬܐ ܛܒܝܥܝܬܐ) with the enhanced assumed man through 'a small portion (ܡܢ ܙܥܘܪ ܡܕܡ)' of his grace similarly to the full-fledged conjunction between the assumed man and the logos achieved at baptism through the Spirit.[62] Since Theodore's elaboration of his concept of human

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[58] *Comm.* 80.7–9, Eng. 37. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 7, Mingana 5.80.

[59] *Comm.* 296.29–297.2, Eng. 137. In *De Incarnatione* (Frag. 30, pp. 252–253) Theodore specified that in the Annunciation story in Luke the name Jesus is the appellation for the son born, whereas the title 'Son of High' is the sign for the dignity empowering the *homo assumptus* in baptism to perform his messianic works. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles*: *1 Timothy*, ed. Greer, pp. 610–611.

[60] See, e.g., Augustine, *De spiritu et littera* 5; *Ep.* 217 (to Vitalis); *De correptione et gratia* 34–38.

[61] *Comm.* 297.2–7, Eng. 137.

[62] *Comm.* 298.16–18, Eng. 137. On the soteriological functions of Christ's humanity in Theodore, see F. G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, DC,

development in Christ is conditioned by exegetical constraints, it remains fragmentary and occasionally somewhat ambiguous. However, it can be safely inferred that the fullest conjunction of incarnation in Jesus' lifetime is achieved only through the grace of the Spirit in baptism.[63]

Following the internal logic of the Gospel narrative, Theodore further seeks to conceptualize in christological terms also the events of the post-resurrection stage. He thus incorporates it into his overall scheme of the progressive development of Jesus' humanity. The Interpreter takes care to emphasize that the sayings in John regarding the resurrected Christ and his ascension refer to the assumed man and not to the logos, which remains immutable – one more indication of Theodore's loose union christology:

> The Son of Man will ascend (ܢܣܠܩ) into heaven, and this is something that has never happened to anyone until now. Therefore, when he ascends, he will clearly demonstrate the *nature dwelling in him* (ܦܣܐ ܕܫܪܐ ܒܗ) that naturally descended without moving (ܕܢܚ ܡܢ ܐܬܪ ܠܐ ܐܬܪ) from any place… He (the logos) therefore assumed him (Jesus) into heaven (ܠܘܩܒܠ ܠܗ ܠܫܡܝܐ) as the one who must be exalted over everything.[64]

The distinction between the assumed man and the logos is further underlined by the usage of the son-of-man title here as explicitly standing not for the heavenly being of Daniel 7 but rather for man or human nature in general.[65]

2005). See also G. Koch, *Die Heilsverwirklichung bei Theodor von Mopsuestia* (Munich, 1965). See further Chapter Three.

[63] For Theodore's notions of grace, see J. McW. Dewart, *The Theology of Grace of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, DC, 1971). In *De Incarnatione* (Frag. 24, p. 250) Theodore further asserts that the logos brought the *homo assumptus* to perfection through suffering.

[64] *Comm.* 72.5–16, Eng. 34.

[65] Cf. *Comm.* 152.9–19, Eng. 70. See also P. Bruns, *Den Menschen mit dem Himmel verbinden. Eine Studie zu den katechetischen Homilien des Theodor von Mopsuestia* (Leuven, 1995); N. el-Khoury, 'Der Mensch als Gleichnis Gottes. Eine Untersuchung zur Anthropologie des Theodor von Mopsuestia,' *Oriens Christianus* 74 (1990), pp. 62–71.

This new glorious state of Christ's humanity is described in terms of fulfilling the potential of the dignity bestowed on it, which in turn finally allows the suspended recognition by the disciples and others of the indwelling logos: 'The dignity of the assumed man was so great that it was perceived that God dwelled in him (ܐܝܟ ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܒܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܫܪܐ ܘܫܟܢ ܘܐܬܚܙܐ ܕܒܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܫܟܢ).'[66] Jesus is in fact presented as being aware of the gap between his human state and dignity and his future post-resurrection glory and dignity.[67]

This post-resurrection enhanced human state is moreover perceived as derived from a *new mode of conjunction* or an even higher degree of realization of the incarnation union potential. This new phase enables a stronger union with the logos: 'He (the assumed man) separated his person from other human beings… by indicating that he had received a *more excellent* grace (ܒܝ ܕܬ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܪ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ ܘܐܬܚܒܪ ܠܗ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܟ ܒܪܐ) through which he is joined together with God the logos like a *real* son (ܕܒܗ ܐܬܚܒܪ ܠܗ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܟ ܒܪܐ).'[68] The upgraded conjunction finds its principal manifestation in Jesus' ascension and his newly acquired universal dominion (ܠܗ ܘܠܟܠ ܡܕܡ, τὴν κατὰ πάντων ἐξουσίαν).[69]

Finally, it leads to the perfect conjunction (ܕܐܬܚܒܪ ܠܗ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܟܡܐ ܕܐܦ ܫܪܝܪ) with the Father mediated through the logos, which was proclaimed separately in advance, according to Theodore, by both Jesus and the logos.[70] This new phase of conjunction with the Father is manifested by the greater glory of the assumed man in his post-resurrection heavenly existence: 'As a result of ascending to heaven, I achieve greater glory in my conjunction with the Father

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[66] *Comm.* 310.15–16, Eng. 143 with a slight change. See also the Greek fragment of the commentary to John 17:4–5: 'Reveal me to them making known to them my divine nature (τὴν θείαν μου φύσιν)… the invisible one, through which my glory is also made manifest (τὴν ἀόρατον δι' ἧς καὶ ἡ δόξα μου γίνεται καταφανής).' Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles*: *Philippians*, ed. Greer, pp. 322–323.

[67] *Comm.* 255.14–18, Eng. 117.

[68] *Comm.* 350.19–22, Eng. 162.

[69] *Comm.* 306.26–30, Eng. 141.

[70] *Comm.* 273.5–9, Eng. 125; 271.3–4, Eng. 124.

(ܐܒܐ ܠܐ ܒܗ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܐܢܫܐ ܠܐ ܟܕ ܡܬܚܫܒ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܒܗ ܐܬܝ ܒ ܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܒܐ, δοκῶ ἐν μείζοσιν ἀναβιβάζεσθαι εἰς οὐρανοὺς).'[71] Theodore also indicates here the polemical implication of his position: in contradistinction to the heretics (the Arians) who exploit John 14:28 ('I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I') to prove that the nature of the Father is greater than that of the Son-Logos, Theodore claims that Jesus referred here to the enhanced mode of conjunction of the assumed man and not to the 'logos whose divine nature did not suffer the torment of the cross (ܟܝܢ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܝ ܒܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܢ ܨܠܒܐ ܘܥܠ ܐܘ ܕ

the sublime and admirable garment of incorruptibility (ܘܠܒܫ ܠܗ ܠܒܘܫܐ ܕܐܦܬܪܣܝܐ ܣܓܝ̈ܐ ܘܫܦܝܪ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ, τῷ εἰς ἀφθαρσίαν μεταχωρήσαντι σώματι).'[74] Moreover, this dramatic change pertains not only to his human body but also to his human soul, which now finally becomes immutable similarly to the logos: '[The resurrected Jesus] had received a better life in an imperishable body and an immutable soul (ܘܩܒܠ ܠܗ ܚܝܐ ܛܒܬܐ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܘܒܢܦܫܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܠܦܐ).'[75] Although the concept of such imperishability is not peculiar to Theodore, for him, it is idiosyncratically integrated into his overall scheme of a progressive upgrade of the humanity of the assumed man as caused by the enhanced conjunction with the logos and, correspondingly, the realization of the full potential of grace through the Holy Spirit after resurrection.[76]

Furthermore, this transformation of the humanity of Christ appears to be taken a step further, somewhat reminiscent of Origen's concept of the resurrected body. The Interpreter states explicitly that the new body is not simply an enhanced natural human body but is in fact 'a *different and exalted* body (ܘܒܕܡ ܐܚܪܢ

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[74] *Comm.* 347.9–11, Eng. 160. See also *Comm.* 350.5–8, Eng. 162; *Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.75. The new mode of bodily existence in immortal nature renders material nutrition superfluous; hence, Theodore explicates Jesus' post-resurrection meal with the disciples as a mere didactic stratagem tailored to strengthen the disciples' belief in his bodily resurrection. See *Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.78. In his commentary on 1 Timothy (ed. Greer, pp. 612–613) Theodore spells out that in the ascension Christ was made 'clearly visible (*perspicuus*)' to angels.

[75] *Comm.* 347.4–6, Eng. 160. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 5, 8, Mingana 5.60, 85; *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles*: *Ephesians*, ed. Greer, pp. 190–191. In his *Catechetical Homilies* 14 (Mingana 6.67), Theodore specifies that though the assumed man did not sin during his lifetime, he only became immune to sin with the acquisition of incorruptibility in the resurrection.

[76] On the earlier history of the concept of incorruptibility, see Y. de Andia, *Homo vivens. Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris, 1986); Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 7.5, PG 25, col. 109A, 20.2, PG 25, col. 132A.

ܘܡܬܕܫ ܗܘ ܕܫܚܝܢ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܠܗܐ).'[77] Theodore emphatically specifies that this 'different and exalted' body is 'spiritual and luminous,' which may refer to Jesus' appearance in the scene of the transfiguration, probably understood as a pre-figuration of his post-resurrection bodily glory, and to Paul's famous notion of the resurrected 'spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:44). This concept is also consistent here with Theodore's general preference for a logical and quasi-realistic interpretation – in this case, for Jesus' miraculous appearance before the disciples in a room safely locked from the inside (John 20:26):

> Since he rose from the tomb as a spiritual being (ܪܘܚܢܝܐ), luminous (ܢܗܝܪܐ), thin and agile, he easily passed through closed doors and whatever else he wanted to without any difficulty – although it was no one else who had risen other than that same one who was dead but nevertheless, in the glory of immortality (ܒܫܘܒܚܐ ܘܒܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ), was in a state incomprehensible to us (ܘܡܬܕܫ ܥܡ ܒܠܝܥܘܬ).[78]

CONCLUSION

Theodore's *Commentary on John* highlights the centrality of the concept of progressive development as a core hermeneutical principle grounded in the Interpreter's theological outlook. This principle is also consistent with his method of rational/literal/historical and contextual exegesis that Theodore inherited from his teacher Diodore of Tarsus, elaborated ingeniously and bequeathed to his disciples of the so-called Antiochene school.[79] We have argued that development-centered interpretation is applied in the *Commentary* to a variety of central issues in the Gospel narrative, pertaining to the notions of sacred history and christology. Thus in contrast to a concept current in early Christian

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[77] *Comm.* 349.14, Eng. 161. Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 14, Mingana 6.56.

[78] *Comm.* 357.28–358.2, Eng. 166.

[79] On Diodore's theology, see Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 181–196; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, pp. 352–360. On Diodore's exegesis, see, Schweizer, 'Diodor als Exeget'; Thome, *Historia contra Mythos*.

thought, according to which the logos had been revealed personally to the righteous in the biblical past, Theodore associates this idea with contemporary heretical, primarily Arian, views. He is of the opinion that it is only in the incarnation that the logos was revealed hypostatically and *seen*, whereas earlier God's words (*meltha*, ܡܠܬܐ, logos) were conveyed through intermediaries (angels, prophets).

The period after the incarnation, however, is likewise distinguished by gradual disclosure of christological truths. Though the incarnation is viewed as a direct personal revelation of the logos in humanity and the watershed in the unfolding history of salvation, Theodore maintains that even Jesus' disciples were not in fact ripe for the full apprehension of the divine truth of the incarnation due to their deficient conceptual preparation. Theodore's stance is informed by the Gospel narrative with its inherent dynamic and tensions, resulting in his model of the disciples' gradual enlightenment, the final phase of which comes only after Jesus' resurrection. Yet even then it does not occur instantaneously but is also distinguished by a gradual development. We have noted that according to the Interpreter the content of this final enlightenment is not limited to Johannine christology but includes the kernel of Nicene and post-Nicene theology, as well as principal aspects of Theodore's Antiochene stance.

For Theodore, Jesus' Jewish contemporaries represent the pre-incarnation stage of revelation, a kind of *praeparatio evangelica*, which constituted a matrix common to the Jews in general and the circle of Jesus' disciples. Theodore thus shows a keen awareness of the Jewish matrix of the nascent Jesus movement and ascribes to it a crucial importance for understanding the disciples' conduct and beliefs as anchored in the social and religious reality of their time. In this, Theodore may be viewed as one who anticipates modern scholarly approaches. Correspondingly, there is a clear overlap between the appraisal of the disciples' pre-Easter epistemic limitations and that of the Jews, some of whom would eventually reach a higher enlightenment. That, combined with Theodore's generally positive appreciation of the Jewish *praeparatio evangelica*, reflects a somewhat mitigated supersessionism and a modicum of understanding of the Jewish predicament.

Moreover, the general framework of gradual development is not limited to progressive revelation but is finally epitomized in Theodore's concept of Jesus' own biographical development –

more precisely, concerning the mode of the union in the incarnation. Theodore discerns two consecutive operational modes, potential and effective, of the logos on the humanity in Christ. This is clearly dictated by Theodore's insistence on full humanity as the subject of development in Christ, emphasized against Arian and Apollinarian views. The first mode, the potential, is applied to the period between the incarnation and Jesus' anointment by the Spirit at baptism. The second mode, the effective, is initiated by the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, explicitly marked by Theodore as conferring the additional grace of empowerment. This grace sets in motion Jesus' public ministry, miraculous powers and moral perfection, newly acquired by his enhanced humanity. Theodore thus presupposes that Christ needed an additional influx of God's grace in order to achieve moral perfection.

Following the logic of the Gospel narrative, Theodore seeks to conceptualize in christological terms also the events of the post-resurrection stage, incorporating it into his overall scheme of progressive development of Jesus' humanity. Jesus' post-resurrection enhanced human state is perceived as derived from a new and stronger *mode of conjunction* with the logos or a higher degree of realization of the incarnation union potential, resulting, inter alia, in bodily transformation. Theodore states emphatically that it is only at the final post-ascension stage that the *perfect conjunction* with the Father mediated through the logos is achieved. This overall concept of progressive development in the mode of conjunction between the *homo assumptus* and divinity seems to be conditioned by the Interpreter's loose-union christology.[80] Yet Theodore's concept of progressive development in the *homo assumptus* also modifies Diodore of Tarsus' radical loose-union christology through the notion of dignity signifying the upgraded humanity of Christ.

Theodore's bold and consistent portrait of Christ's development and gradual realization of the dignity potential indeed seems unprecedented and indicative of Theodore's original genius recruited to the polemics of his time and applied in a hermeneutical framework as part of the battle over the 'correct' understanding of the constitutive acts and sayings of Jesus.

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[80] See also *De Incarnatione*, Frag. 9, ed. Jansen, p. 243.

CHAPTER THREE: ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY

In the previous chapter, we have dealt with Theodore of Mopsuestia's peculiar anthropological concept of Christ's human development in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. This concept, apparently conceived in response to the Arian and Apollinarian challenges, is presented in the *Commentary* in terms of the gradual transformation engendered by the change in the mode of conjunction between humanity and the logos in Christ.[1] We also traced Theodore's notion of cognitive development among the apostles and, potentially, others, culminating in their post-resurrection enlightenment and empowerment. In this chapter, we focus on the implications of these notions, central to Theodore's outlook as represented in the *Commentary*, for the general religious anthropology and soteriology espoused by the Interpreter, both intrinsically connected with Theodore's uncommon pneumatology.[2]

For Theodore, the concept of the empowerment of Jesus by divine dignity through the prosopic union further provides the channel of conjoining humanity at large via Jesus as the assumed man – albeit in an indirect and inferior way – to the *logos*. This is

[1] See also A. Kofsky and S. Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ,' *Revue biblique* 120 (2013), pp. 570–595; 'Hermeneutics of Progressive Development in Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on John in Syriac,' *Parole de l'Orient* 40 (2015), pp. 275–286.

[2] See also A. Kofsky and S. Ruzer, 'Anthropology and Soteriology in Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentary on John*,' *Annali di storia dell' esegesi* 30 (2013), pp. 63–78.

the Interpreter's general soteriological scheme, reflecting at the same time his dualistic loose-union christology:[3]

> God the logos is naturally conjoined with the Father. Through his conjunction with the logos, the assumed man also obtained conjunction with the Father. We, in a similar way, by virtue of the natural conjunction we have with Christ-in-the-flesh (ܒܣܪܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ), in so far as is possible, also receive spiritual participation with him and are his body (ܗܘ ܕܒܪ ܐܠܗܐ ܟܝܢ ܥܡ ܐܒܐ ܒܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܚܕ ܒܗ ܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܐܦ ܗܘ ܐܬܚܕ ܥܡ ܐܒܐ. ܐܦ ܚܢܢ ܒܗܕܐ ܐܝܟ ܒܬܪ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܢ ܥܡ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܐܢ ܐܦ ܚܢܢ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܦܫܪ ܠܢ

> (logos') power because he not only is able to create living creatures but also generously grants them reflective minds (ܒܗ ܡܬܐ ܡܥܩܠ)… This is what (the evangelist) signified by saying: 'And the life was the light of men,' namely, 'This is their origin, this is the bestower of reason (ܡܥܩܠ).'[5]

Moreover, the human *nous* is viewed here as the locus of communication with the light of divine wisdom. Characteristically, Theodore identifies the light of reason, the prowess of intellectual comprehension, with life itself. Although Theodore does not spell it out, it may be speculated that he also sees the locus of the conjunction between the assumed man and the logos in Christ's human *nous*, somewhat similarly to Origen's view regarding the union between the logos and the human soul of Christ.[6] However, with Theodore this is already perceived in terms of his innovative concept of prosopic union discussed in Chapter One. We will relate below to the soteriological import of this outlook.

Theodore's hierarchical concept of conjunction is expressed in his repeated emphasis on the indirect nature of human exposure to the divine light via limited participation in the dignity of the assumed man channeled through his prosopic union with the logos. Thus, commenting on John 1:16 ('And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace'), Theodore suggests that:

> He (the evangelist) says it about his (Christ's) human nature which has every grace in it, but at the same time demonstrates the dignity of the nature which is in him. Through his conjunction with God the logos, by means of the Spirit, he took part in a true sonship (ܒܢܝܢ ܐܝܬ ܟܠ ܫܘܪܝ). We have received a portion of his spiritual grace (ܡܢ ܟ ܐܝܬ ܘܐܡ ܐܝܬ ܕܐ ܡܢ ܐܝܬ), and through it we are made participants together with him in adoptive sonship (ܕܐ ܕܡܬ ܐܝܬ

[5] *Comm.* 29.1–19, Eng. 14.

[6] Origen, *De principiis* 2.6.5–6, ed. P. Koetschau (Leipzig, 1913); Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.161, ed. Preuschen (Berlin, 1903).

ܕܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ), even though we are very far away from such dignity (ܐܦ ܥܠ ܦܝ ܕܠܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܫܘܝܢ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܪܚܝܩ).[7]

Here, Theodore lists among the effects of the participation in the dignity activated by the Spirit among the disciples not only the empowered cognition but also supernatural power (ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܥܒܕ) to perform miracles and, ultimately, the gift of resurrection and immortality.[8] Specifically, this initial empowerment of the disciples takes place after Jesus' resurrection and appearance (John 20:19–23): 'He first breathed on them and then said, "Receive the holy spirit… (John 20:22–23)… The Spirit, at the right time, will confer upon you resurrection and immortality. Even in this life you will receive amazing, supernatural power through the Spirit to perform unheard-of miracles".'[9] It deserves notice that, in the final account, this supernatural empowerment is presented by Theodore as intrinsically connected to the noetic enlightenment engendered by the spiritual conjunction with the assumed man: 'It was necessary that he granted these gifts so they might know that he was of the same nature and substance of the Spirit (ܘܗܘ ܒܗ ܗܘ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܕܢܕܥ ܕܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܘܡܢ ܥܬܝܐ ܠܗ ܕܢܬܠ ܠܢ ܫܘܠܛܢ ܣܓܝ), who would give them an overabundance of gifts.'[10] Afterward, the ongoing empowerment of the believers would be activated by the descent of the Spirit in baptism and in the Eucharist.[11]

Linking the reception of grace (John 1:16) with the willing acceptance of the logos in Christ (John 1:12–13), and stressing again the hierarchical concept of dignity, the Interpreter argues that:

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[7] *Comm.* 38.2–38.5, Eng. 18. See also *Comm.* 271.3–9, Eng. 124; *Comm.* 314.26–315.6, Eng. 145.

[8] *Comm.* 354.28–355.2, 356.15–18, Eng. 164–165.

[9] *Comm.* 354.7–344.2, Eng. 164.

[10] *Comm.* 355.2–6, Eng. 165.

[11] *Comm.* 152–153, Eng. 70–71. For further elaboration on the Eucharist, see *Comm.* 142.9–143.3, 148–153, Eng. 66, 69–71. On Theodore's Eucharistic views in the *Commentary on John*, see Ducros, 'L'eucharistie chez Théodore de Mopsueste,' pp. 366–367.

> He made them equal in honor (ܫܘܝܘܬܐ ... ܥܡ ܫܘܝܐ, ἰσοτιμία) by giving them to enjoy the privilege of sonship (ܛܘܒܬ ܒܢܘܬܐ ܕܫܘܝܐ, τῆς υἱότητος τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν). Not according to their nature (ܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܣܝܡܬܗ, οὐ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν), not by being reborn in the body, but being born through divine power (ܒܚܝܠ ܐܠܗܝ, θείᾳ δυνάμει) through a certain similarity and conjunction with him (ܒܕܡܘܬ ܘܒܚܒܪܘܬ ܥܡܗ, ὁμοιότητός τε καὶ συναφείας).[12]

It deserves notice that the partial nature of the disciples' participation in the assumed man's dignity – and even 'weaker' participation of the believers in general – reflects the descending order of transmission of dignity, from the logos to the assumed man who was 'admitted' (ܐܫܬܠܡ) into the logos' 'true sonship.'

Alongside that concept of hierarchy, the Interpreter presents the soteriological progress of the believers as following the crucial stages of Jesus' own development – bestowing of the Spirit in his baptism and his resurrection and ascension – marked by the changes in the mode of conjunction with the indwelling logos:[13]

> Our fulfilled regeneration (ܕܐܬܝܠܕ ܒܬܕܝܕܘܬܐ ܕܐܬܬܟܠ) is first perfected (ܐܬܓܡܪ) in Jesus Christ, and then transmitted through him to believers, not only as a type but also in reality (ܠܐ ܒܨܠܡܐ ܐܦ ܠܐ ܒܡܗܘܬ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ), so that we will be participants in his resurrection (ܕܢܗܘܝܢ ܫܘܬܦ ܒܩܝܡܬܗ ܕܡܬܐ).[14]

The human state before that had been completely subject to Satan's dominion so that 'there was no human being capable of attacking this tyrant (ܛܘܪܢܐ).' Jesus therefore paves the way for an individual victory over that tyrannical power or, in the words of the

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[12] *Comm.* 32.23–29, Eng. 15 (commenting on John 1:12–13: '…he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh…').

[13] See Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ.'

[14] *Comm.* 38.16–21, Eng. 18.

Interpreter's Jesus himself: 'Therefore I came for every person (ܒܪܢܫܐ ܟܠ ܕܐܬܐ ܐܢܐ ܥܠ ܗܢܐ).'[15]

The first stage of the believers' regeneration, therefore, is marked by their baptism, which is conceived of as the beginning of their new 'natural relationship' with the assumed man: 'And then through regeneration (ܒܥܕܬܐ ܘܒܝܠܕܐ) [in baptism] it is as if a *natural relationship* (ܩܪܝܒܘܬܐ ܛܒܥܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܘ) has now been established *toward the man who was assumed* (ܠܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܐܬܚܕ).'[16] This early 'natural relationship' apparently refers to the initial phase of conjunction between the humanity of the believers and that of the assumed man, clearly indicated by Theodore's subsequent invocation of his favorite terminology of conjunction (ܚܒܝܪܘܬܐ) regarding the resulting indirect union – mediated by the *homo assumptus* – between the humanity of the believers and the logos: 'And thus we too receive an ineffable conjunction with God the logos (ܘܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܚܢܢ ܩܒܠܝܢ ܚܒܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܚܕ ܥܡ ܐܢܫܐ ܗܘ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ).'[17] This initial phase, symbolically anticipating resurrection is, however, qualified by Theodore as merely sowing the first seeds of this conjunction, to be fully realized only later:

> We receive *grace* (ܛܝܒܘܬܐ) through the same spirit in the birth that is conferred to us here through baptism (ܒܥܕܬܐ ܘܒܝܠܕܐ ܕܡܬܝܗܒ ܠܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܒܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ), namely, through a figure of the resurrection (ܒܬܨܠܡܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ). But we only *receive a small amount as a pledge* (ܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܩܒܠܝܢ ܐܢܚܢ ܐܠܐ ܒܪܫܡܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ) (see Eph. 1:14). We will receive all of it when we are truly resurrected (ܒܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ ܢܩܒܠ ܟܠܗ) and participate in incorruptibility (ܘܢܫܬܬܦ ܒܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܠܦ).[18]

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[15] *Comm.* 243.30–244.1, Eng. 112.

[16] *Comm.*81.25–26, Eng. 38.

[17] *Comm.*81.26–28, Eng. 38.

[18] *Comm.* 79.22–27, Eng. 37; see also *Comm.* 81.1–3, Eng. 38 ('God took a portion [ܒܨܐ] of this grace and gave it to all so that they might participate in that same [grace]'); *Comm.* 78.22–79.2, Eng. 37; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De Incarnatione*, Frag. 11, ed. Jansen, p. 243; *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Greer, pp. 86–87; *Commentary on Ephesians*, ed. Greer, p. 190–191; *Commentary on Colossians*, ed. Greer, p. 386–387.

Moreover, as the gift of the Spirit was said to provide Jesus with greater-than-human moral capacities, the future resurrection of the believers is conditioned on their moral behavior following baptism. By rising from the dead he (Jesus)

> …gave us the sure hope of resurrection (ܚܝܢܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܘܡܬܩܛܠ) through adoptive sonship (ܒܢܝܢ ܬܐ)… as he regenerated us (ܐܝܟ ܕܒܪ ܠܢ) in the hope of resurrection so that death itself will never destroy that hope. This is symbolized in baptism (ܡܬܩܛܠ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܒܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ).[19] Besides this he prepared for us the delights of the heavenly kingdom, if we preserve pure in our actions (ܒܬܪܥܝܬ ܡܕܒܚܐ) the honor of adoptive sonship (ܝܩܪܐ ܕܒܢܝܢ ܬܐ) given to us through baptism.[20]

Theodore's Jesus thus promises that he 'can provide those who ask with virtues superior to human nature (ܡܕܒܚܐ ܘܡܬܟܝ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܠܥܠ).'[21]

Also in our projected post-resurrection state, we are supposed to follow the final upgrading of our humanity, namely, transformed into incorruptibility of body and soul, conforming to what Jesus underwent following his resurrection: 'I do not remain dead when I die since my body will not be subject to corruption (ܠܐ ܒܩܝ ܐܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܠܝܐ). Instead, after the soul departs for a short time, the body will soon be resurrected and the soul will remain incorruptible (ܠܐ ܕܢܩܘܡ ܘܢܬܩܛܠ).'[22] Or, as Theodore put it, again, commenting on John 3:3 ('…unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God') and clinging to the progressive scheme commenced at baptism:

> We hope indeed to see the kingdom of God because, while we are mortal, we cannot go there unless we are resurrected to an *incorruptible state* (ܠܐ ܒܠܝܐ ܕܐ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ) after our death. We believe that this happens through the type of baptism. We are born anew in a type of the resurrection (ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܘܡܬܩܛܠ) since we

[19] Cf. Rom 1:2–4.
[20] *Comm.* 35.10–20, Eng. 17.
[21] *Comm.* 87.29–88.1, Eng. 41.
[22] *Comm.* 246.14–18, Eng. 113.

> enter into a new state of being (ܒܬܘܬܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܕܐܢܫ ܥܡ ܒܬܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ).[23]

This new state, further described as a 'better make-up (ܫܦܝܪ ܐܦܝܘܬܐ),' is conceived of as pertaining to humanity – initially sharing a common bodily nature with Christ – which by the grace of the Spirit conferred in baptism becomes a collective body *in conjunction with the upgraded nature* (ܥܡ ܦܘܣܐ ܕܐܬܬܣܩ) *of the assumed man*. The Interpreter depicts this upgraded collective body as the subject of ultimate transformation into the state of incorruptibility after resurrection.[24] In fact, this new body is viewed as belonging to a new spiritual nature that is 'beyond perishable nature (ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܦܘܣܐ ܕܡܬܚܒܠ)' and represents humanity as a whole, which 'no longer considers Adam as the head and beginning of its existence but rather Christ-in-the-flesh (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܒܣܪܐ),' who became their progenitor into 'that life.'[25]

The new bodily condition is described by Theodore in his *Commentary on Ephesians* as luminous existence 'of great brightness (*multa claritate*)' and 'perpetual union (*perpetuam coniunctionem*) with God.'[26] This is clearly modeled after the metamorphosis of Jesus' post-resurrection body as described by Theodore in the *Commentary*: 'He (the resurrected Jesus) had assumed forever the sublime and admirable garment of incorruptibility (ܠܒܫ ܝܩܪܐ ܘܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܕܠܥܠܡ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܒܠ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܐ, τῷ εἰς ἀφθαρσίαν

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[23] See *Comm.* 66.15–21, Eng. 31.

[24] *Comm.* 78.5–17, Eng. 36–37. See also *Comm.* 214.26–215.1, Eng. 98; 245.15–20, Eng. 112; 322.28–31, Eng. 149. Cf. *Comm.* 315.20–22, Eng. 146: 'We similarly, by virtue of the natural conjunction we have with Christ-in-the-flesh, insofar as is possible, also receive spiritual participation with him and are his body (ܐܦ ܚܢܢ ܒܓܢܝܣܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܣܐ ܕܐܬܬܣܩ ܥܡ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܒܣܪܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܟܠ ܕܡܫܬܘܬܦ ܠܢ ܒܪܘܚܐ ܘܐܢܘܢ ܦܓܪܗ ܘܓܘܫܡܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܦ ܚܢܢ

μεταχωρήσαντι σώματι).'[27] Moreover, as we have seen, this dramatic change pertains not only to his human body but also to his human soul, which now finally becomes immutable similarly to the logos: '[The resurrected Jesus] had received a better life in an imperishable body and an immutable soul (حصيزا لا محمسحنا محمسكصسلا لا محصحما).'[28] For Theodore, as noted, this concept is idiosyncratically integrated into his overall scheme of progression of the assumed man's humanity, engendered by the enhanced conjunction with the logos and, correspondingly, the realization of the full potential of grace through the Holy Spirit after resurrection.[29] Theodore takes this idea of transformation of Christ's humanity a step further, claiming that the new, 'spiritual and luminous,' body is not simply an enhanced natural human one but is in fact 'a *different and exalted* body (وهدحد هما وهدم اسنم حصيزه).'[30]

Following this paradigm, Theodore further specifies that resurrected humans, in their state of bodily incorruptibility, will not be in any further need of material nourishment (لاوهسلا اسنلا).[31] In his *Commentary on Galatians* the Interpreter also states that in the age to come (*futuro saeculo*) humanity will 'rest from all activity,' being held together by love (*caritas*).[32] Elsewhere the Interpreter elaborates that the post-resurrection spiritual nourishment is in fact the grace of the Holy Spirit granting immortality to the body and

[27] *Comm.* 347.9–11, Eng. 160. See also *Comm.* 350.5–8, Eng. 162. In the *Catachetical Homilies* 9 (Mingana 5.103/223) Theodore explicitly states – with reference to Phil 3:21 – that the believers' post-resurrection body will be 'like Jesus's glorious resurrected body.'

[28] *Comm.* 347.4–6, Eng. 160.

[29] On earlier notions of incorruptibility, see De Andia, *Homo vivens*; Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 7.5, PG 25, col. 109A, 20.2, PG 25, col. 132A.

[30] *Comm.* 349.14, Eng. 161.

[31] *Comm.* 137.14–17, Eng. 63.

[32] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians*, e. Greer, pp. 154–155.

immutability to the soul.[33] This emphasis clearly informs Theodore's perception of the Eucharist, which seems to provide for a complementary channel of human enhancement in addition to the *noetic* conjunction of the believers' humanity with the dignity-enhanced humanity of the assumed man. Here, however, it appears that the *material* nourishment, provided by the Eucharistic bread representing the enhanced human body of Christ, generates the potential for the future post-resurrection bodily transformation into eternal life.[34] Theodore, accordingly, following the logic of John 6, rejects the sign of the Feeding the Five Thousand (John 6:1–14) as pertaining to our transitory life only, in favor of the Eucharistic sacrament (ܪܙܐ), 'the food which endures to eternal life' (John 6:27), which Theodore interprets as the food which 'confers eternal life (ܡܬܠ ܒܚܕܐ ܡܪܡܝ).'[35] Moreover, commenting on John 6:53 ('Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you'), the Interpreter states emphatically that without this Eucharistic channel, which, in fact, conditions the work of the Holy Spirit, the *bodily* participation in eternal life is impossible.

At the same time, Theodore characteristically reiterates his symbolic understanding (ܡܠܠܐ ܕܡܠܐ, ܡܠܠܐ) of Jesus' Eucharistic words[36] – a tendency rather common in early Christianity that coexisted peacefully with 'literal' interpretations.[37] Here as else-

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[33] See Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catachetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.71; *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Greer, pp. 12–13, 46–47, 154–155, 166–167; *Commentary on Philippians*, ed. Greer, p. 340–341, 344–345.

[34] Cf. Ducros, 'L'eucharistie chez Théodore de Mopsueste.' According to Theodore, Christ's body represented in the Eucharist is 'incorruptible' soon to be transformed into an immortal nature. It seems that the Interpreter has in mind here the transitory state of the body between the atoning death and the resurrection rather than the post-resurrection body (*Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.87).

[35] *Comm.* 137.27–29, 138.27–28, Eng. 64.

[36] *Comm.* 148.23–149.2, Eng. 69.

[37] J. Betz, *Eucharistie in der Schrift und Patristik* (Freiburg, 1979). For a similar symbolic understanding in early Syriac literature, see the fourth-

where Theodore gives his explanation as if quoting Jesus. 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will be joined to me through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. They will possess, *as it were*, a natural union with me, enjoying eternal life.'[38] This symbolic understanding is further spelled out in Theodore's explanation that the symbolic consummation in the sacrament, nourishing our symbolic existence initiated in baptism, will become redundant with our resurrection. In other words, 'the nature of these signs and symbols should fit our *present condition* in which we take the symbolical food.'[39]

In sum, Theodore's thinking retains a certain unresolved duality with regard to the channels of conjunction between the believers and the humanity of Christ, complementarily affecting the post-resurrection human state. Whereas the Spirit-centered channel clearly derives from the Gospel narrative itself, the bodily avenue hinges on the Eucharistic soteriology. This unusual, albeit unspecified, convergence of the two channels in Theodore's thought eventually provides for a transformed *bodily* existence of the resurrected humanity.

PNEUMATOLOGY IN CONTEXT

Pneumatology is allotted a crucial role in Theodore's soteriological anthropology; this seems to have been affected by the polemics

century *Liber graduum* 21.1, col. 585.4–15, ed. M. Kmosko, Patrologia Syriaca, vol. 3 (Paris, 1926).

[38] *Comm.* 150.1–3, Eng. 69.

[39] *Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.74. Theodore apologetically harmonizes this stance with Jesus' words at the Last Supper: according to him, Jesus did not explicitly state 'This is the symbol of my body…' but rather 'this is my body…' wishing us to see the elements not according to their nature as bread and wine but '*as if* they were his body and blood' (*Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.75). This may be viewed as a moderate symbolical approach. For Theodore's theology of the Eucharistic liturgy in the *Catechetical Homilies*, see C. Leonhard, 'Why Does Theodore of Mopsuestia Interpret the Liturgies in an Allegorical Way?' in S. Hawkes-Teeples, B. Groen and S. Alexopoulos (eds), *Studies on the Liturgies of the Christian East* (Leuven, 2013), pp. 141–156.

regarding the divine status of the Holy Spirit and is therefore intrinsically linked to the Interpreter's stance on trinitarian theology.[40] Theodore thus relates polemically, albeit in passing, to the divine status of the Spirit contested in his time by the so-called *pneumatomachoi*, who, according to him, 'diminish the person of the Spirit (ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܡܙܥܘܪܝܢ).'[41] He asserts that the Spirit, being uncreated and unique, is united exclusively to the Father and the Son (ܒܪܐ ܘܒܪܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܒ ܩܕܡ ܟܠ) and was not included by the evangelist among 'all things' – both visible and invisible (ܟܠ ܕܢܬܚܙܐ ܘܕܠܐ ܢܬܚܙܐ) – made through the logos (John 1:3).[42] Consequently, the Spirit neither belongs to the category of heavenly created order, such as angels and spirits, nor performs any angelic service (ܠܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܕܡܠܐܟܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ).[43] Theodore further employs the statement in John 15:26 that 'the Spirit… proceeds from the Father' to buttress his theological claim – again, apparently directed against the *pneumatomachoi* – that the hypostasis of the Spirit is of the same essence as that of the Father (ܡܢ ܐܒܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܫܛܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܐܝܟ ܐܒܐ, ἐξ αὐτῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς τῆς οὐσίας), proceeding directly from the Father in a 'natural procession' (ܡܫܬܕܐ ܛܒܝܥܝܐ, φυσικὴν πρόοδον).[44] It seems that the Interpreter is inclined to distinguish between the birth of the Son-Logos and the emanation ('natural procession') of the Spirit from the Father: 'Here he (Jesus) mentions it (the Spirit) as something unique (ܝܚܝܕܝܐ)… the one who alone proceeds from the Father (ܕܡܢ ܐܒܐ ܘܒܪܗ ܩܕܡ ܟܠ ܕܡܬ, ὃ μόνον ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται ἔξεισι).'[45] In this context, it is noteworthy that Theodore's hermeneutical constraints motivate him to distinguish between the hypostatic and non-hypostatic references to the Spirit by the evangelist – namely, that in the

[40] See discussion in Chapter One. See also Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Shaping Christology in a Hermeneutical Context: Theodore of Mopsuestia's Endeavor in Face of Contemporaneous Challenges,' *Adamantius* 19 (2013), pp. 256–275.

[41] In relation to John 16:12–14, *Comm.* 296.19–21, Eng. 136.

[42] *Comm.* 26.19–27.30, Eng. 12–13.

[43] *Comm.* 26.19–27.30, Eng. 12–13, esp. *Comm.* 27.11–24, Eng. 13.

[44] *Comm.* 288.5–9, Eng. 132.

[45] *Comm.* 288.13–15, Eng. 133.

fourth Gospel the term 'Holy Spirit' often indicates not the person or the nature of the Holy Spirit (ܕܠܐ ܗܘ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܐܠܐ) but its works and grace (ܥܒܕܘܗܝ ܘܛܝܒܘܬܗ).'[46]

In the *Commentary*, however, it is not the trinitarian but rather the christological and soteriological issues that are the author's main concern with regard to pneumatology. Thus the Spirit is ascribed a cardinal role in effecting Christ's own human development, where the Interpreter discerns three foundational phases and events (see Chapter Two). First, Theodore sees the Spirit – harmonizing John's Prologue with the synoptic accounts of Mary's impregnation – as an active agent in bringing about the initial conjunction between the logos and the humanity of Christ in the incarnation: 'Christ-in-the-flesh, when he was not yet in his nature – namely, conjoined with God the Word – necessarily needed the mediation of the giving of the Spirit (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܒܣܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܥܕܝܢ ܒܛܒܝܥܘܬܗ ܐܝ ܟܕ ܚܕ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܬܚܕ ܒܗ ܒܛܒܝܥܬܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܠܐ ܡܨܥܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܠܡܫܪܝ ܒܗ ܘܠܡܥܒܕ ܒܗ ܥܒܕܘܗܝ ܘܛܝܒܘܬܗ).'[47] The event of the incarnation inaugurates the first phase of the assumed man's life, characterized by a loose mode of conjunction with the logos, and its potentiality.

The Spirit is similarly portrayed by the Interpreter as introducing the second phase, with its tighter mode of conjunction, ushered in by Jesus' anointment by the Spirit at his baptism. It is only thence forward that Jesus is empowered with additional grace: 'The descent of the Spirit (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ) was not useless even for him (Christ) with regard to the conferring of grace (ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ).'[48] This grace sets in motion Jesus' public ministry, miraculous powers and moral perfection, newly acquired by his enhanced humanity: 'After receiving every perfect grace (ܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܓܡܝܪܬܐ), which he received thanks to his anointing (ܕܐܬܡܫܝܚ), he lived a life of great integrity (ܘܐܬܪܒܝ ܒܫܠܡܘܬܐ ܓܡܝܪܬܐ) in a way that is not possible for human nature (ܒܐܝܟ ܕܠܐ ܡܨܝ ܠܒܫܪܐ ܕܐܢܫ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ).'[49] As noted, not unlike Augustine's claim with regard to

[46] *Comm.* 162.9–13, Eng. 75. See also *Comm.* 277.6–8, Eng. 127.

[47] *Comm.* 296.26–29, Eng. 137.

[48] *Comm.* 80.7–9, Eng. 37.

[49] *Comm.* 296.29–297.2, Eng. 137.

humanity in general, Theodore presupposes regarding Christ a need for an additional grace to achieve moral perfection.[50]

This division of the consecutive phases is clearly dictated by Theodore's insistence on full humanity as the subject of development in Christ, emphasized against Arian and Apollinarian views.[51] As suggested in Chapter Two, the concept of a pre-baptism mode, when the empowerment by the logos has not yet been activated, seems to be the background for Theodore's fierce rejection of apocryphal stories of Jesus' childhood miracles in the Infancy Gospels: 'It is certainly foolish (ܗܘ ܕܥܠ) to believe that any of those events reported about our Lord during his childhood (ܕܗܘ ܕܐܝܟ) ever happened.'[52]

The third and final phase is inaugurated by Jesus' resurrection and ascension leading to an even higher level of conjunction of the assumed man with the logos, to whom he is now joined 'like a real son (ܐܝܟ ܒܪ ܘܐܝܟ ܕܒܪܐ)'[53] and, ultimately, to the perfect conjunction (ܚܕ ܒܚܕ ܕܐܬܚܕ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ) with the Father.[54] Here as well, the Interpreter presents the Spirit as the active agent behind this foundational event: 'Christ-in-the-flesh attained resurrection through the Spirit (ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܩܝܡ ܒܗ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ).'[55] But whereas in the first and second instances Theodore's emphasis on the instrumentality of the Spirit is apparently dependent on the gospel narratives, here he needs to appeal to the authority of Paul with reference to Rom 8:11 ('If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead…'). This scheme allows Theodore to highlight the Spirit's paramount role at all three crucial transformations in the

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[50] See, e.g., Augustine, *De spiritu et littera* 5; *Ep.* 217 (to Vitalis); *De correptione et gratia* 34–38.

[51] *Comm.* 33–34, Eng. 16. See also Lorenz, 'Die Christusseele im Arianischen Streit'; and Chapter One.

[52] *Comm.* 59.3–12, Eng. 28. See Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ.'

[53] *Comm.* 350.19–22, Eng. 162.

[54] *Comm.* 273.5–9, Eng. 125; 271.3–4, Eng. 124.

[55] *Comm.* 314.8–12, Eng. 145.

progression of the assumed man, seemingly expressing the author's special agenda of accentuated pneumatology.

The role of the Spirit in Theodore's soteriology seems to derive, *mutatis mutandis*, from the Interpreter's model of Christ's human development. The initial phase of incarnation is naturally excluded, and, as far as Jesus' disciples are concerned, even the phase of baptism – apparently due to the fact that the disciples' baptism as an initiation into Jesus' circle, let alone the accompanying gift of the Spirit, is nowhere specifically mentioned in the Gospels. In the disciples' case, therefore, the Spirit's operation on their transformation began only after Jesus' resurrection as outlined in John 20:22 ('…He breathed on them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"'), whereas they had earlier suffered from a restricted cognitive ability, so that even the teaching delivered by their Master had to be adapted correspondingly.[56] According to Theodore, it is this 'breathing on' of the Spirit by the resurrected Jesus that he himself had promised earlier (John 16:13: 'When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth') that finally grants the disciples the proper cognition:

> Then you will know the nature of the Father (ܐܒܐ ܕܝܢ ܗܘ), the dignity of the Son (ܒܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܗܘ) whose birth is beyond comprehension (ܠܐ ܡܬܝܕܥ ܐܠܐ ܠܐܝܠܝܢ), the communication of his essence (ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܐܒܘܗܝ) and the perfect similarity (ܘܕܡܘܬܐ ܫܠܡܬܐ ܕܝܠܗ) of his (the logos') nature in the divine plan worked out among humanity. How great is the dignity that has been conferred upon him (the assumed man) and who is the one in him, and what the conjunction (ܚܒܪܐ) is between him and the one who – notwithstanding the difference of the natures between the two – could exist in him through the power of the one who made it so. Then you will also come to know the dignity of the Spirit (ܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܝܢ ܗܘ) whose work among the human race

[56] See Chapter Two; Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ.'

> is so powerful that it can communicate God the logos (ܠܘܓܘܣ ܐܠܗܐ).[57]

As noted, this initial phase of enlightenment by the Spirit takes place after Jesus' resurrection and, in fact, in light of his imminent departure/ascension, so that from now on the Spirit becomes the 'new comforter' or, so to speak, the new mediator. Theodore clearly recognizes the functional overlap between the logos in the assumed man and the Spirit during the *homo assumptus*' lifetime, reflected in the ambivalence of the term 'comforter (*paraclete*)':[58] 'He (Jesus) says "another *paraclete* (ܦܪܩܠܛܐ)," that is, another instructor… meaning the comforter… He also refers to the Spirit as "another" because while he (Jesus) was among them, he certainly filled this same role for them as well (ܗܘ ܐܦ ܒܗܝ ܕܥܡܗܘܢ ܟܕ ܗܘ ܡܠܦ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܗܘܢ).'[59] The new, post-ascension situation, however, is presented as enabling the disciples to overcome their earlier cognitive deficiencies – where Jesus had to communicate the christological truths verbally through didactic stratagems to be later deciphered:

> The Spirit did not instruct the disciples through speech (ܠܐ ܒܡ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܡܠܦ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܗܘܢ) but communicated to their souls the revelation of the doctrine through an ineffable mystery (ܠܐ ܒܠ ܚܙܘܪܐ ܕܡܠܦܢܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܗܘܢ ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܢ ܠܒܐ ܕܡܠܦ ܐܦ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܗܘܢ) and gave them a comprehension of the profound truths (ܕܥܡܩܬܐ). Therefore, after the descent of the spirit, they were easily able to understand the things they had heard from the only begotten

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[57] *Comm.* 294.9–18, Eng. 135. See also *Comm.* 357.2–6, Eng. 165.

[58] Such an ambivalent functional overlap between the logos and the Spirit characterizes early Christian thinking. See Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1:55–57. This confusion is still highly prominent in Aphrahat's fourth-century christology. See Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, Chapter One: 'Aphrahat: A Witness of pre-Nicene Syrian Theology.'

[59] *Comm.* 272.3–17, Eng. 125.

> (ܫܡܝܐ) and had not understood, especially when he spoke about his nature (ܥܠ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܦܓܪܗ).[60]

Theodore establishes therefore the principle of the Spirit's immediate, non-verbal communication (cf. 2 Corinthians 3). It is clear that after Jesus' resurrection and ascension the Spirit is able to adequately communicate the deepest divine truths to the disciples and, later, to the believers in general, because of its perfect trinitarian unity and equality with the Father and the Son-Logos.[61] This empowerment by the Spirit is what enables the conjunction between the humanity of the disciples and that of the assumed man in his post-resurrection state: 'After being reborn by the power of the Spirit (ܗܐ ܘܐܬܝܠܕܬ ܒܚܝܠܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ, ἀναγεννηθέντων ὑμῶν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ Πνεύματος), you are with me as the body (ܐܝܟ ܓܘܫܡܐ ܥܡܝ ܒܗ ܐܢܬ, ἐν τάξει μοι σώματος γενομένων) and I am with you as the head (ܘܐܢܐ ܒܪܫܐ ܥܡܟ ܐܬܚܙܝ, κεφαλῆς χώραν ὑμῖν ἐπέχειν ἐπ' ἐμέ)' (with reference to Eph 4:15–16, Col 2:19).[62] As noted above, this empowerment promises that at the right time the spirit will confer resurrection and immortality upon them too. Moreover, already in this life they will receive supernatural power to perform miracles.[63]

Whereas in the case of the disciples' empowerment by the Spirit Theodore had to adapt to the Gospel narrative and link it to Jesus' post-resurrection appearance, with future believers this crucial stage is firmly, and naturally, relocated in their baptism.[64] Thus, in a sense, the second foundational phase of the assumed man's human development sets the archetype for the believers'

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[60] *Comm.* 294.25–31, Eng. 136. See also *Comm.* 273.30–31, Eng. 126: 'You will know and receive what is incomprehensible (ܘܠܐ ܡܬܦܗܡ) (now) through me.'

[61] *Comm.* 295.10–16, Eng. 136.

[62] *Comm.* 274.30–275.2, Eng. 126. Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Ephesians*, ed. Greer, pp. 208–209.

[63] *Comm.* 354.7–355.2, 356.15–18, Eng. 164–165.

[64] For Theodore's symbolic interpretation of the baptismal liturgy, see D. L. Schwartz, *Christian Initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, D.C., 2013), pp. 127–140.

spiritual and cognitive initiation enabling their conjunction with the enhanced humanity of Christ:

> This assumed man (ܒܢܝܫܐ ܗܘ ܐܬܐ) had indeed received the grace (ܛܘܒܢܐ) of the Spirit, which was like an anointing (ܡܫܝܚܘܬܐ) for him, and the Spirit through its intercession (ܡܦܠܚܢܘܬܗ) provided him his conjunction with God the logos (ܩܪܝܒܘܬܐ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܘܓܘܣ). Therefore all those other believers who followed being reborn through the power of the Spirit (ܒܝܕ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ), were made the body of Christ (ܦܓܪܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ), so that they received conjunction with him (ܩܪܝܒܘܬܐ ܥܡܗ).[65]

The operation of the Spirit at this stage is further perceived by Theodore as mediated by apostolic succession delegated by the officiating priest, while the hierarchy we have noted above is upheld here with the Interpreter's emphasis on the partial nature of the empowerment by the Spirit:

> From the fullness of the gift of the Spirit… received by the apostles in a smaller portion (ܒܙܥܝܪܐ) from Christ-in-the-flesh… in the same way all true believers received grace through these (apostles), and thanks to the service of priests throughout the centuries. And through (this grace), they obtain *a sort of* natural conjunction (ܩܪܝܒܘܬܐ ܛܒܝܥܝܬ ܐܝܟ ܕ) with Christ… This natural *small portion* (ܙܥܘܪܬܐ ܛܒܝܥܝܬ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܢܐ)… produces *a likeness* of its nature (ܕܡܘܬܐ ܠܛܒܝܥܬܗ), so also this

[65] *Comm.* 281.11–16, Eng. 129. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 9, 10, 14 (Mingana 5.103, 113; 6.56), where Theodore specifies that through baptism and the grace of the Spirit the believers are conjoined to the dignity of the assumed man, acquiring a *potential* for future change of their nature expressed in immortality, incorruptibility and immutability, and eventually to the divine nature of the logos. Whereas Theodore naturally regards the post-lapsarian human nature as mortal, he indicates that originally the human nature of the protoplasts had been immortal. Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Greer, pp. 10–11; *Commentary on Colossians*, ed. Greer, p. 370–371.

> portion of spiritual grace brings about a participation in honor and glory (ܗܘ ܕܒܪܝܬ ܐܦ ܗܢ ܕܫܘܬܦܘܬܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܘܕܝܩܪܐ).[66]

Elsewhere, though, the Interpreter seems to claim that direct workings of the Spirit have all but ceased, yet he concedes that their weaker form still occurs rarely through the prayer of holy men (*sancti*).[67]

Theodore's notion of empowerment by the Spirit seems to apply also to its operation in the Eucharist, the treatment of which in the *Commentary* highlights the polemical context of his pneumatology. Having emphasized – evidently against the *pneumatomachoi* – the divine consubstantial nature of the Spirit, the Interpreter promulgates the complete separation between the divine nature of the Spirit and the humanity of Christ's Eucharistic post-resurrection body. This understanding of Christ's body consumed symbolically (ܐܟܝܠܬܐ) by the believers is evidently informed by the Interpreter's dualistic christology:

> It is not the body that through its nature grants this benefit, but it is the divine nature which is not immersed in matter that bestows this (eternal) life through the body… In other words, through his conjunction with this (spiritual/divine) nature he gives (eternal life) to those who 'eat him'… This should make it clear that his (the logos') nature is equal to the Spirit (ܟܕ ܠܐ ܦܓܪܐ ܗܘ ܕܡܬܝܗܒ ܗܕܐ ܚܝܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܐܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܛܒܥ ܒܗܝܠܐ ܕܒܣܪܐ ... ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܕܐܟܠ ܐܢܘܢ ... ܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܒܗ ... ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܐܟܠ ܐܢܘܢ ... ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܒܪܝܬ ܐܢ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܗܘ).[68]

And finally the Spirit, which as we have seen is presented – without any explicit backing in the Gospel narrative – as the active agent in

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[66] *Comm.* 314.26–315.6, Eng. 145.

[67] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians*, ed. Greer, pp. 506–507.

[68] *Comm.* 152–153, Eng. 70–71. For further elaboration on the Eucharist, see *Comm.* 142.9–143.3, 148–153, Eng. 66, 69–71. On Theodore's Eucharistic views in the *Commentary on John*, see Ducros, 'L'eucharistie chez Théodore de Mopsueste,' 366–367.

Jesus' resurrection,[69] is likewise portrayed as bringing about the general resurrection marking the second, ultimate phase of the transformation of humanity, following in the steps of the post-resurrection Christ: 'Since Christ-in-the-flesh obtained the resurrection through the Spirit, we also necessarily will receive the same dispensation from the Spirit (ܠܟܦ ܒ ܟܗ ܟܗܒܚܢܗܐ ܘܢܫ).'[70]

CONCLUSION

We have dealt in the previous chapter with Theodore of Mopsuestia's peculiar concept of Christ's human development, reflected in his *Commentary on John* as a response to the Arian and Apollinarian challenges and expressed in terms of the gradual change in the mode of conjunction between humanity and the logos in Christ. In this chapter, we have focused on the implications of this notion for the general religious anthropology and soteriology espoused by the Interpreter, intrinsically connected with his uncommon pneumatology.

We have seen that Theodore transposes his model of Jesus' gradual enhancement through the dignity of the logos, with adaptations dictated by the Gospel narrative constraints, to the soteriological trajectory of the disciples and believers in general. Moreover, he applies his christological terminology of conjunction also to the unity between the enhanced humanity of Christ and that of his followers. Thus the soteriological path of the latter is likewise presented as a gradual upgrading of their conjunction – in this case, with the *homo assumptus* (and consequently with the logos). Yet the Interpreter upholds the hierarchical order by discerning the relative hierarchy of the measure of grace bestowed upon the assumed man, the disciples and the believers in general.

In the context of his polemic with the *pneumatomachoi*, Theodore strives to safeguard not only the consubstantiality of the

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[69] Theodore nevertheless finds such a supporting reference in John 6:63 ('It is the spirit that gives life…'); see *Catechetical Homiles* 10 (Mingana 5.110).

[70] *Comm.* 314.8–10, Eng. 145. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 10 (Mingana 5.107, 110).

Spirit but also its pivotal role in all crucial soteriological phases: in the three foundational junctions of Jesus' own christological development – incarnation, baptism and resurrection – and in the following empowerment of the disciples and believers, and their path to enlightenment and final salvation. One can discern a certain tension in Theodore's thought about the *nous* as the primary locus of cognitive conjunction between Jesus' empowered humanity and that of the believers, and his interpretation of the Eucharist as an essential complementary *corporeal channel* of conjunction. According to the Interpreter, it is the consumption of the symbolic post-resurrection body of Christ – inspired by the Spirit – that provides the necessary nourishment for the future incorruptible bodily existence of our transformed resurrected humanity, following Jesus' own example. Theodore' religious anthropology is thus characterized by the salient emphasis on the humanity of Christ as the actual soteriological medium and channel of humanity's conjunction with the divine. This scheme is achieved by the Interpreter through applying his idiosyncratic christological terminology of Christ's conjunction with the logos and the assumed man's acquired dignity to the soteriological union between Christ's enhanced humanity and the community of believers.

CHAPTER FOUR: ON JEWS AND JUDAISM

In previous chapters, we traced some key features of Theodore of Mopsuestia's hermeneutics in his *Commentary on John.*[1] In Theodore's overall concept of cognitive development concerning christological truths, reflected in the unfolding of biblical history, he outlines in an uncommon way the special place of the Jewish matrix of nascent Christianity. This stance, as reflected especially in the Interpreter's *Commentary on John*, is the focus of the present chapter, where we also further elaborate on some issues addressed earlier.

Theodore's attention to Jews and Judaism is, of course, part and parcel of the general Christian preoccupation with the Jewish roots of Christianity. For the Interpreter, understandably, it is mainly in his capacity as an exegete that the issue is broached. Thus, within his so-called historic-grammatical, literal and critical exegesis, Theodore demonstrates acquaintance with Jewish traditions and usages, applying them in his critical reading of Scripture. As noted in the Introduction, according to Leontius of Byzantium with regard to the Book of Psalms: 'Following the usage of the Jews he [i.e. Theodore] interpreted all the psalms as referring to Zerubbabel and Hezekiah. He applied to the Lord only three

[1] See also Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation and Human Development in Christ'; 'Shaping Christology in a Hermeneutical Context: Theodore of Mopsuestia's Endeavor in Face of Contemporaneous Challenges'; 'Anthropology and Soteriology in Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentary on John*.'

psalms.'[2] Moreover, Theodore was inclined to accept only Old Testament books recognized by the Jews: He does not quote the Old Testament apocrypha; which seem not to have been an essential part of his canon. Some scholars also have suggested that the 'Jewish tendencies' in Theodore's exegesis derived from his knowledge of Hebrew; but there is not sufficient evidence to indicate that, even though he often uses the terms 'Hebrew voice' and 'Hebrew idiom,' and refers to the original Hebrew text as the authentic source for correct understanding and as the medium of revelation.[3] In fact, a conspicuous trait of the Antiochenes is their overall tendency to interpret the biblical text literally, commonly taken as indicating their close relationship to Jewish exegesis. This may also account for Theodore's relatively moderate attitude to Jews in general (in comparison to prominent contemporaneous Church Fathers, such as his friend John Chrysostom and Augustine), which we characterize here as mitigated super-sessionism, reflected in his *Commentary on John*: According to him, Israelites were acquainted with the logos as revealed in their Old Testament. Theodore occasionally refers to the Jews as making accurate statements regarding the meaning of biblical texts.[4] He even commends them for memorizing the commandments of the Torah and using the phylacteries as a constant reminder of their obligations.[5] Moreover, he even presents Jesus as 'diligently follow-

[2] Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, PG 86:1365D. Theodore in fact considered as messianic prophecies the same four psalms as those recognized by his teacher Diodore of Tarsus (Ps 2, 8, 45[44] and 110 [109]).

[3] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Psalms* 127, 133, 195, 249, ed. R. Devreese (Vatican, 1939); D. Z. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis* (New York, 1989), pp. 56–57. Theodore's disciple Theodoret of Cyrrhus – another great representative of the Antiochene School – also shows familiarity with Jewish traditions and the works of Jewish authors, and even uses Jewish material to illustrate his argument.

[4] See *Comm.* 215.27–216.4, Eng. 99.

[5] See Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 12, Mingana 6.32. Elsewhere he elaborates on Paul's claim in Gal 3:23 that before faith came

ing the precepts of the law (ܗܘ ܕܡܬܪܥܐ ܒܫܠܡܘܬܐ ܕܢܡܘܣܐ, ὁ τῆς ἀκριβείας ἐπιμελησάμενος τοῦ νόμου),' so that Moses regards him as 'completing his work and [one] whom he considers worthy to be declared shepherd (ܪܥܝܐ, ποιμήν).' And according to Theodore, Jesus himself unequivocally confirmed his diligent observance of the Torah.[6] Elsewhere Jesus is claimed by the Interpreter to have been the only one to fulfill 'the Law with all exactitude (ἀκριβεία, *cautela*)' and thus to pay 'the price for our redemption' and 'made us free from its (the Law's) curse' (cf. Deut 27:26).[7] Theodore also emphasizes that Christ's 'human nature comes from the Jews (ܡܢ ܝܗܘܕ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܢܫܝܘܬܗ).'[8]

This general attitude seems to find expression also in Theodore's strong opposition to christological interpretations of the psalms and other messianic *testimonia* entrenched in patristic literature, and to the pre-incarnation revelations of the logos and the Holy Spirit to patriarchs and prophets.[9] According to Theodore, Old Testament prophecy as a whole, because of its 'hyperbolic' imagery, rich metaphorical meaning and symbolism, does not present Christ directly but only lends itself to such interpretation. As we have suggested in Chapter Two, this is part of

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Jews had been 'guarded' by the Torah, see also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians* 3:23; 4:3, ed. Greer, pp.78–79, 92–95.

[6] *Comm.* 197–198, Eng. 91. See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 6, Mingana 5.69. Elsewhere the Interpreter, apparently referring to the traditional Christian apologetic motif of Jesus' superiority over Moses, mentions Jews making a comparison between Moses and Jesus in favor of the former. However, according to Theodore Jesus refuses to participate in the competition, discreetly suggesting that he – or more precisely his works – should be compared with those of the Father (*Comm.* 141–142, Eng. 65–66).

[7] *Commentary on Galatian*s 3:13, ed. Greer, pp. 64–65. Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 6, Mingana 5.69. See A. Le Boulluec, 'Les temps du régime de la loi et la justification par la foi selon Théodore de Mopsueste dans son Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Galates,' in I. Bochet, M. Fédou (eds), *L'exégèse patristique de l'épître aux Galates* (Paris, 2014), pp. 33–58.

[8] See *Catechetical Homilies* 6, Mingana 5.64.

[9] See *Catechetical Homilies* 2, Mingana 5.27.

Theodore's biblical theology of progressive revelation, which would eventually pertain even to Jesus' human development, where Theodore rejects Jesus' apocryphal childhood miracles.[10]

PRE-INCARNATION JUDAISM AND ITS LIMITATIONS

In his *Commentary on John*, Theodore elaborates on the nature of Old Testament revelation. As noted in Chapter Two, he rejects as unacceptable a notion current in early Christian thought according to which the logos had been revealed personally to the righteous (ܐ̈ܢܫ̈ܐ) – namely, patriarchs and prophets – in the biblical past in quasi-angelic form. Moreover, he seems to associate it with contemporaneous heretical, primarily Arian, views, though in fact these views were entertained by some important early Christian writers.[11] For Theodore, the logos was revealed hypostatically only in the incarnation, whereas earlier, God's words had been conveyed to biblical Israel through angelic intermediaries.[12] Invoking John 1:18 ('No one has ever seen God') as proof that the logos had never been *directly witnessed* before the incarnation,[13] the Interpreter, further distinguishes between the logos' manifestation in the flesh ('was coming into the world,' John 1:9) and his omnipresence in the world before that 'according to his *hypostasis and his nature*.'[14]

Theodore characteristically claims that the notion of serial pre-incarnation appearances of the logos was common among John's Jewish contemporaries: 'In fact, there was a firm belief (ܣܒܪܐ) among them (Jews) that he had indeed appeared to them

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[10] See *Comm.* 59.3–12, Eng. 28. See also Introduction and A. Kofsky, 'Theology and Hermeneutics among Greek and Syriac Christianity, and Contemporaneous Judaism (4th–5th centuries): Paradigms of Interactions,' *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 293 (2013), pp. 75–90; Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation.'

[11] See discussion in Chapter Two. It may be worthy of notice that this motif is absent in Aphrahat's writings; see Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, p. 16.

[12] *Comm.*18–19, Eng. 9.

[13] *Comm.* 42.29–43.6, Eng. 20.

[14] *Comm.* 32.3–13, Eng. 15. See also Fatica, 'Il commento di Teodoro di Mopsuestia a Giovanni, 1, 1–18.'

many times in different guises (ܒܫܘܢܝ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ).'[15] Theodore may have regarded the Christian concept he opposes as espoused by his Jewish contemporaries, who were thereby prevented from recognizing the uniqueness of the revelation in incarnation. What clearly underlies Theodore's polemical strategy here is his apprehension that such a position could potentially jeopardize the singularity of the incarnation by relativizing the divine manifestation in the Messiah.

Nevertheless, his polemic does not annul a positive appraisal of biblical Israel as cognizant of divine truths. Theodore retains the basic pre-incarnation perception of the logos as omnipresent and as the voice proclaiming God's will (ܟܠܗ ܗܘ ܡܢܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܡܪ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܘܐܚܕ ܒܗ ܘܒܗ ܟܠ ܙܒܢ) – in fact as God's intermediary in his dealings with the world and humanity.[16] The logos thus in fact conveyed its messages to ancient Israel, albeit only indirectly, which, as noted, informed Theodore's perception of the revelatory development leading from biblical past to Christ. Within this understanding, the "deficient" character of the biblical Jews' theological cognition is derived not from their flawed religious attitude but rather from the objectively veiled nature of the revelation they were exposed to – this is what prevented Israel from a true recognition of its Lord (ܕܠܐ ܐܬܝܕܥ ܒܗ ܡܪܝܗ, τὸν οἰκεῖον δησπότην).[17] It is this attitude – not devoid of sympathy for the 'Jewish preparatory predicament' – that we suggest branding as mitigated supersessionism.

Theodore ascribes an indirectness to even the famed vision of Isaiah 6, where according to him the prophet is allowed to perceive only the glory (ܫܘܒܚܐ, δόξα) of the triune deity, whereas its divine nature remains unrevealed and unfathomable (ܠܐ ܐܬܓܠܝ ܗܘ ܐܠܐ ܒܫܘܒܚܐ).[18] As noted, Theodore, though subsuming the primor-

[15] *Comm.* 43.1–3, Eng. 20.

[16] *Comm.* 18.20–21, Eng. 9.

[17] *Comm.* 32.14–15, Eng. 15.

[18] *Comm.* 248.10–17, Eng. 114. But cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 16, Mingana 6.101, where Theodore says that Isaiah's vision in fact already included the revelation of not only God's grace but also the trinitarian

dial hypostatic existence of the logos, may retain here a rudimentary limited concept of the pre-incarnation logos as the voice and message of God, distinctly expressed by Aphrahat.[19]

JESUS' MESSAGE AND CONTEMPORANEOUS JEWISH MILIEU

The Gospel of John is distinguished by frequent references to Jews, without attention to the internal divisions of contemporary Jewish society characteristic of the Synoptic narrative. For Theodore, these Jews often represent the pre-incarnation stage of revelation, a kind of *praeparatio evangelica* that constituted a matrix common to the Jews in general, including the circle of Jesus' disciples. Theodore thus shows a keen awareness of the Jewish matrix of the nascent Jesus movement and ascribes to it a crucial importance for understanding the disciples' conduct and beliefs as anchored in the social and religious reality of their time. As remarked in Chapter Two, in this Theodore anticipates modern scholarly approaches.[20] Such an understanding informs Theodore's definition of both the initial post-incarnation overlap between the disciples and the Jews at large in their Messianic expectations, and of the eventual Christ-centered cognitive *quantum leap* that would distinguish between the two groups.

In addition to elaborating on the revelatory stage of biblical Israel, the Interpreter emphasizes the cognitive situation of Jesus' Jewish environment. The Gospel of John, characterized, as noted, by recurrent references to Jews *en bloc*, provides ample opportunity to address the issue. For Theodore, first-century Jewry seems to stand mainly for pre-incarnation stages of revelation, a *praeparatio evangelica* of sorts delivered through the prophets.[21] According to

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doctrine (ܠܐ ܒܝܕ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܐܠܐ ܡܠܬܐ). See also *Catechetical Homilies* 16, Mingana 6.118.

[19] See Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, pp. 10–11 and discussion in Chapter 2.

[20] Cf. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible*, pp. 6, 179.

[21] See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles*, *Commentary on Galatian*s 3:23, ed. Greer, pp. 82–83.

him, it constituted a general Jewish matrix, also shared by Jesus' disciples, especially regarding messianic beliefs. For Theodore, the *praeparatio evangelica* that first-century Jewry seems to stand for, is the message delivered through the prophets. Such recognition underlies Theodore's perception (a) of the initial post-incarnation overlap between Jews in general and the disciples in their Messianic beliefs; (b) of the cognitive limitations shared by the two groups; and (c) of the eventual cognitive breakthrough that would set the disciples apart.

This emphasis on the shared background, however, is regularly complemented by a balancing act establishing the disciples' relative superiority. In this vein, Jews are said to have indeed been privy to righteousness and the virtue of loving kindness derived from the Torah of Moses,[22] whereas Jesus' followers excelled in a more true loving kindness, manifested in the remission of sins. Similarly he argues elsewhere that even despite their scrupulous study of the just law of the Torah the Jews had never 'been able to acquire an intimacy' with God.[23] In addition, whereas the Jews did receive a promise of resurrection by the logos (ܡܠܬܐ), only with Jesus' resurrection his followers became God's 'adopted sons (ܒܢܝ ܫܡܝܐ),' receiving a 'sure promise of the resurrection (ܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܝܬܐ ܘܩܝܡܬܐ)… through the power of the Spirit (ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).'[24]

As for the messianic expectations entertained by the Jews, even if only partially correct, they were firmly grounded in biblical revelatory tradition. The Jews thus acknowledged that Elijah's advent precedes that of the eschatological prophet and, consequently, the Messiah. They, however, did not comprehend that Elijah was supposed to come only just before the *parousia*; and that the eschatological prophet and the Messiah would be one and the same person. This is Theodore's solution to the exegetical

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[22] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatian*s 4:23, ed. Greer, pp. 116–117.

[23] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Ephesians* 2:17–18, ed. Greer, pp. 228–229.

[24] *Comm.* 35.3–17, Eng. 17. See Ferraro, 'L'esposizione dei testi pneumatologoci.' Cf. *Catechetical Homilies* 12, Mingana 6.19.

aporia in John 1:25–26: 'They asked him [John the Baptist], "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know…"'[25]

Theodore further sees Nathanael in John 1:49 as representing how common Israel viewed the Messiah who is to come – namely, as 'someone more intimate with God than anyone else (ܕܡܢ ܕܡܪܝ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܟܕ ܡܛܠ ܚܒܝܒ ܗܘ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ, ὡς οἰκειωμένου παρὰ πάντας Θεῷ).'[26] It is this perception they expressed by using the appropriate title 'son of God,' yet they interpreted it in a 'fairly obscure and carnal way (ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ, ἀμυδρότερον καὶ σωματικώτερον).'[27] Furthermore, commenting on John 12:34 ('We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever'), Theodore clarifies that the Jews who 'thought highly of the Messiah… expected that he, like Elijah, would remain immortal (ܕܠܐ ܡܝܬ ܗܘ).'[28]

This may serve as a good example of the balancing act between the positive assessment of the intermediary *praeparatio evangelica* and a critical evaluation of its incompleteness. As noted, the cognitive incompleteness here is commonly applied by Theodore both to contemporaneous Jews at large and to the disciples, who according to Theodore belong to the same epistemological category. Commenting on John 7:34, the Interpreter states: 'The Jews did not understand any of these words. And this is not surprising, because even the *disciples*… could not understand the words that were said at that time (ܘܒ ܒܙܒܢܐ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܗ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܐ ܕܐܡܪ

According to Theodore, even Jews who did not belong to the circle of the disciples were capable of recognizing the authoritative and charismatic power of Jesus. This explains the otherwise unexpected consent of the powerful merchants to be expelled from the Temple precincts (John 2:14–16) – the Interpreter claims that they would have not agreed to be driven out by a mere Galilean simpleton.[30]

In the final account, the cognitive deficiency of the Jews – as with that of the disciples – consists precisely in their inability to grasp the divine nature of the logos dwelling in Jesus, the assumed man: 'You do not know me perfectly. Even though you know me by external appearance, you do not know what is hidden inside me (ܐܝܟ ܕܝܢ ܚܙܝܬ ܠܒܫܐ ܐܢܫܐ ܠܐ ܚܙܝܬ ܠܟܝܢ ܕܟܣܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܝܕܥܬ).'[31] The Jews in general, again like the disciples, are constrained in their judgment by human standards: 'Since you only judge these things by the flesh (ܒܦܓܪܐ) you see, you do not know the one who performs these wonders (ܕܥܒܕ ܠܗܠܝܢ).'[32] Therefore, when Jesus spoke of himself and the Father being one (John 10:30), the Jews understood the claim but mistook it for blasphemy, as they could not conceptualize the presence of the divine logos in Jesus.[33] Consequently, had the Jews been aware of the 'power and wisdom of him who was inside the one who would undergo the passion (ܕܒܓܘ ܗܘ ܚܝܠܐ ܘܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܐܢܘܢ ܕܐܬ ܒܗ ܕܐܬܚܙܐ ܒܫܒܝܠ ܕܐܬܠܝܢ ܒܗ),' they would not have conspired to kill Jesus.[34] Elsewhere, Theodore specifies that the Jews expected the Messiah from the House of David to be of only a human nature and in that they 'were in harmony with the words of the prophets.'[35]

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[30] *Comm.* 61.5–8, Eng. 29.

[31] *Comm.* 159.24–25, Eng. 74. On Theodore's christology, see Chapter One and references there. Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De Incarnatione*, Frag. 1, ed. Jansen, p. 233.

[32] *Comm.*165.21–23, Eng. 76.

[33] *Comm.* 215.30–216.7, Eng. 99. See also *Catechetical Homilies* 4, Mingana 5.48.

[34] *Comm.* 261.1–4, Eng. 120.

[35] *Catechetical Homilies* 8, Mingana 5.83.

According to Theodore, Jews could not possibly have invented the charge that Jesus claimed to be equal with God: 'It seems impossible to me that the Jews conceived this opinion about Christ by themselves… It is only logical for us to assume that they obviously concluded that he *made* himself equal with God (ܐܝܟ ܐܝܬ ܥܒܕ ܠܗ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ) because he had called God his father (ܘܠܐܠܗܐ ܐܡܪ ܐܒܐ ܕܝܠܝ ܗܘ ܐܝܟ).'[36] The Interpreter forcefully argues – another indication of his mitigated supersessionism – that Jews even before Christianity had been privy to the notion of sonship, calling God their father,[37] without however thinking they were equal to him.

As Theodore further clarifies, humans can be conceived of in a relation of sonship to God only in terms of 'adoptive grace (ܒܛܝܠܘܬܐ),' and 'not by nature (ܠܐ ܟܝܢܐ).'[38] This part of Jewish *praeparatio evangelica* paradoxically becomes the source of the problem: Not knowing that the issue in question here is, in fact, the divine logos in Christ, the Jews could not help interpreting Jesus' statement as sacrilege: 'In his words they found that he called God his Father, indicating a *natural birth* (ܒܝܠܕܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ).'[39] Consequently, had the Jews been aware of the 'power and wisdom of him who was inside the one who would undergo the passion (ܕܒܗ ܕܐܬܟܠܝܠ ܒܗ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܘܚܝܠܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܒܗ ܕܐܬܚܙܐ ܒܣܘܦܪ),' they would not have conspired to kill Jesus.[40] This emphasis is also directed against a specific argument by Arians searching Scripture for proofs of the Son's inferiority and subordination, a tendency explicitly mentioned by the Interpreter: 'Some for whom it is quite easy to twist everything, without considering the whole context (ܕܠܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܡܦܟ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܠ), assert that

[36] *Comm.* 105.25–106.12, Eng. 49.

[37] Cf. Tertullian, *De oratione* 2, ed. G. F. Diercks, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 1 (Turnholt, 1954), pp. 255–274, where the late second century author claims that it was only through Christ that his followers achieved sonship.

[38] *Comm.* 107.24, Eng. 50.

[39] *Comm.* 107.26–28, Eng. 50; see also 108.16–20, Eng. 50.

[40] *Comm.* 261.1–4, Eng. 120.

Jesus indeed did not make himself equal with God, but that the Jews only thought he did.'[41]

Thus with all the *praeparatio evangelica* of the Jews, Theodore emphasizes its limitations, epitomizing the Jewish predicament in Jesus' times in the following fashion: 'Judaism, although it appears to have an understanding of the divine nature, nevertheless is not perfect in that understanding (ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܐܦ ܥܠ ܦܝ ܗܢܐ ܕܝܢܘܬܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܠܡ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܕܝܢܐ

ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܝ ܥܕܢܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܟ, ἔσται δέ μοι καιρὸς ὁπνίκα σαφῶς ἐμαυτόν, ὅστις εἰμί πᾶσιν ποιήσω κατάδηλον).'[48] As in the case of earlier biblical revelations here also Jewish cognitive deficiency is conceptualized as derived from the limited character of the preparatory role assigned to them in the overall divine scheme. Again, this indirect collective exculpation of the Jews may be another indication of Theodore's mitigated supersessionism.

Jesus, however, inserts subtle indications to be eventually understood also by the Jews at the end of days, when they, so Theodore envisions, will turn to the Fourth Gospel: 'Even though the Jews could not understand these topics at the time, he nonetheless spoke about them, so that later they might consult (ܢܣܒܪ) this book (i.e., John's Gospel).'[49] These 'insertions' mainly pertain to the coexistence and distinction of the human and divine natures in Christ and their respective actions and predicates – it is telling that this is the issue that would, according to Theodore, naturally present a particular difficulty for the Jews. The above indications may take the form of refined allusions, such as the one Theodore discerns in John 8:14: 'He was making known the honor of his humanity and also dimly alluding to his divinity (ܗܘ ܕܡܘܕܥ ܠܟܒܘܕܗ ܕܒܢܝܫܘܬܗ ܘܐܦ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܪܡܙ ܠܐܠܗܘܬܗ ܕܝܠܗ).'[50] Similarly, when replying to the accusations of the Jews (John 5:9–47), Jesus only hints at his dignity and divinity, in order not to undermine what he has to say about the apparent weakness of his human nature.[51] And he intentionally refrains from saying explicitly that it was him (as logos) who gave their forefathers manna in the wilderness, though it could have been derived from his enigmatic silence; according to Theodore, though hidden from the disciples

[48] *Comm.* 155.5–14, Eng. 72.

[49] *Comm.* 113.290–114.5, Eng. 53 (commenting on John 5:20). See also *Comm.* 20.17–19, Eng. 9–10; *Catechetical Homilies* 8, Mingana 5.83–84.

[50] *Comm.* 165.16–18, Eng. 76; cf. ibid. 167.11–12, Eng. 77.

[51] *Comm.* 138.2–8, Eng. 64; 113.24–29, Eng. 52. See discussion in Chapter Two and in Kofsky and Ruzer, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on Progressive Revelation.'

and Jews in general, this would have been already clear to the evangelist at the time of composing the Gospel.[52]

Another type of encrypting of the deferred christological message is defined as figurative or metaphorical (ܡܬܠܝܐ, ܡܬܠܐ, ܐܣܛܪܘܢܘܡܝܐ). Thus, commenting on John 8:16, Theodore claims that since the Jews would not have been able to understand what Jesus was saying about his divinity 'he chose to speak figuratively.'[53]

To sum up, Theodore's generally positive appreciation of the Jewish *praeparatio evangelica*, reflects a stance of what may be called mitigated supersessionism, which also conveys a modicum of understanding of the Jews' immanent inability to grasp the Messiah's nature. It goes without saying that this does not preclude Theodore's retaining the strong motif of Jewish hostility toward Jesus featuring prominently in the Fourth Gospel.[54] It is moreover telling that there is a clear overlap between the appraisal of the disciples' pre-Easter epistemic limitations and that of the Jews.

Within Theodore's appraisal of Jesus' contemporaneous Judaism, the figure of John the Baptist clearly stands out. According to the Interpreter, whereas the evangelist regards the Baptist not as 'the true light' of the logos (John 1:8–9), he nevertheless views him as a *temporary light* shining in the 'Jewish darkness' before revelation of the true light in the Messiah. The implication of Theodore's understanding here may very well be

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[52] *Comm.* 141–142, Eng. 65–66.

[53] *Comm.* 166.16–19, Eng. 77; cf. ibid. 165.14–18, 25–27, Eng. 76; 251.3–7, Eng. 115.

[54] See, e.g., *Comm.* 101.19–103.7, Eng. 47–48; 279.22–25, Eng. 129. Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatian*s 2:7–9, 5:11, ed. Greer, pp. 30–31, 140–141; *Commentary on Ephesians*, ed. Greer, Introduction, pp. 176–177; *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians*, ed. Greer, pp. 456–457; *Catechetical Homilies* 12, Mingana 6.22. One may note that elsewhere (*Catechetical Homilies* 13, Mingana 6.41–42) Theodore does express some traditional anti-Jewish sentiments, such as an opposition to imitation of Jewish practices among Christians, which he mentions together with astrology as an example of serving Satan – not unlike his friend John Chrysostom. See also *Commentary on Galatians* 4:3, ed. Greer, pp. 92–95.

that Jesus was not the exclusive bearer of light, with John the Baptist representing a Jewish approximation of that. The nature of the Baptist's limitations is further spelled out in a different context. Theodore explains that while Jesus was indeed immersed *by John*, he could not possibly have been baptized in 'John's baptism,' aimed at the atonement of sins, but rather by a 'Christian' baptism of the Spirit, inaugurated by Jesus himself, since John did not have the powers to convey the Spirit.[55]

The Baptist thus plays the distinctive role of potentially advancing the preparatory disposition of the Jews and, in a sense, provides for Theodore a missing link between their restricted messianic lore and the divinized christology of Jesus.[56] In his *Homilies*, the Interpreter commends in this context the Torah as the gate for righteousness in Jesus, opened by John the Baptist.[57] The Baptist therefore signals a new phase in Jewish cognitive development, one that anticipates Theodore's concept of development in the humanity of Christ himself.[58] As noted, Theodore's enhancement of John the Baptist's cognitive awareness as a temporary light appears to convey a certain relativization of Christ's revelatory mission. At the same time, according to Theodore, that higher level of the Baptist's cognition paradoxically caused tension with those of the Baptist's more enthusiastic followers who regarded him as the messianic bearer of light: 'The evange-

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[55] See Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 14, Mingana 6.66.

[56] *Comm.* 82–83, Eng. 38–39.Theodore emphasizes that the Baptist's choice of Jesus from among the multitude of repentant Jews was based on 'objective enlightenment' and not on his kinship with Jesus. It was to that end that John had from childhood been segregated in the wilderness and had no contact with his relatives – to avoid any suspicion of nepotism (*Comm.* 45.1–4, Eng. 21).

[57] See Theodore of Mopsueatia, *Catechetical Homilies* 14, Mingana 6.65–66.

[58] On Theodore's concept of the human development of Christ, see Chapter Two. One may note that the Interpreter, inspired by the narrative context, also attributes a higher level of cognition to the Samaritans, compared to the Jews. See *Comm.* 85–91, Eng. 40–42.

list is making it clear that John [the Baptist] had come to the conclusion that his purpose was to confront the Jews… He [the evangelist] wanted to accuse those who had thought that John [the Baptist] had to be accepted, whereas they crucified the one about whom John had testified.'[59] In any case, in the final account the Baptist's messianic preaching to the Jews, aiming at their cognitive advancement, would end in a *cul de sac*.

JESUS AND THE TORAH

Apart from attempts to outline the Jewish predicament vis-à-vis the new christological revelation, Theodore provides certain indications of his own attitude toward the Jewish law – an ongoing concern of Christian theologians and exegetes. A case of Sabbath observance, or more specifically of Jesus' healings performed on the Sabbath, is instructive here. Unlike, for example, a Synoptic tradition, preserved in Luke 13:10–17, where Jesus offers quasi-halakhic arguments for his healing on the Sabbath, Theodore, commenting on John 5:2–18, advocates the view that indeed the Jews (or possibly humans in general), *the assumed man included*, are subject to Sabbath prohibitions without concessions backed by casuistic reasoning. In fact, it is God's angels who are allowed to act on the Sabbath, according to the divine command; but Theodore's Jesus does not resort to such a justification for his act either. Rather, Jesus opts for a clear-cut argument grounded in God's own omnipotence and superiority over his own law: According to Theodore's logic, the notion of equality with the Father assumes that no one else but the consubstantial logos dwelling in Jesus has the same authority to act on the Sabbath for our salvation: 'There is no commandment or law that would prevent him from doing whatever he wants.'[60] It clearly shows that,

[59] *Comm.* 30.25–30, Eng. 14 (commenting on John 1:7–8).
[60] *Comm.* 103.17–105.4, Eng. 48.

according to Theodore's understanding, the man Jesus never exceeded the boundaries of contemporaneous Jewish law.[61]

The Interpreter thus appears to legitimize the law-abiding religiosity of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries within the context of their limited *praeparatio evangelica*. Elsewhere, he goes as far as claiming that 'because in the present life and after Christ's coming we are plainly still subject to committing transgressions… *we need the law*…'[62] It deserves notice that in his *Homilies* Theodore seems also to commend the Jewish Temple priesthood for conducting the *earthly* worship of mortals in a worthy way.[63] The Interpreter, of course, also supplies a programmatic reservation, stating that though in principle the law is necessary 'for the present life,' Christians are in fact already living by type of the age-to-come and are therefore exempt from the law.[64] Nevertheless, Theodore allows for an alternative 'Jewish path' to 'justification through the law,' yet only 'with great difficulty.'[65]

CONCLUSION

Although there are certain indirect indications of Theodore's possible actual contact with Jews and/or Jewish biblical exegesis, this chapter has focused primarily on the function of the Jews in

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[61] See also Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.80. Cf. Aphrahat, *Demonstration XII*, see ed. and Latin trans. I. Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca 1 (Paris, 1894), cols. 505–540.

[62] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Greer, pp. 74–75. Cf. ibid., pp. 84–85: 'The law is good because by filling an office of a pedagogue it has guided us to these things.' See also ibid., pp. 76–83, 122–123.

[63] See Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 15, Mingana 6.81.

[64] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Philippians*, ed. Greer, pp. 348–349; for the particular case of circumcision, cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Greer, pp. 88–89; *Commentary on Ephesians*, pp. 224–225; *Commentary on 1 Timothy*, pp. 538–539.

[65] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Greer, pp. 118–119.

the Interpreter's overall theological construct of progressive revelation promulgated especially in his *Commentary on John*.

The Interpreter legitimizes the law-abiding religiosity of the Jews within the context of their limited *praeparatio evangelica*, claiming in fact that even those who belong to the Messianic era would still remain subject to sin and thus in principle require a measure of restraint by God's law, though the believers, thanks to the partial grace received in baptism, are exempt from the particulars of Jewish religious law.

Moreover, according to Theodore, Jesus himself explicitly declared his faithful observance of the Torah and he is further claimed to have been the only one to meticulously fulfill the Torah to the letter. In other words, the Interpreter's positive attitude to the religious precepts of the Jews anchored in the Torah is complemented by his uncommon view of Jesus as a strictly law-abiding Jew.

As opposed to the traditional Christian paradigm of the religious decline of the Jews through the ages, Theodore's positive appraisal of biblical Israel as cognizant of divine truths stands out as devoid of that motif. The Interpreter upholds the idea of the pre-incarnated logos as omnipresent, as the voice proclaiming God's will and as the intermediary in God's dealings with ancient Israel. This informs Theodore's perception of the revelatory continuum and cognitive development concerning christological truths, from the biblical past to Christ. We have shown that, according to Theodore, the deficient character of the biblical Jews' theological cognition is derived not from their unsatisfactory religious stance but rather from the objectively veiled nature of the revelation to which they were exposed.[66] It is this attitude, not devoid of sympathy to the 'Jewish cognitive limitations,' that we brand as mitigated supersessionism.

As for Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, they come to represent the pre-incarnation stage of revelation, a kind of *praeparatio evangelica*. In the *Commentary*, this is repeatedly and tellingly presented as a common background of the Jews as a whole and Jesus' disciples. Theodore thus painstakingly emphasizes the Jewish

[66] Cf. 2 Cor 3:12–16.

matrix of the nascent 'Jesus movement,' ascribing to it a critical significance for understanding the disciples' conduct and faith as rooted in their religious setting. The clear overlap between the disciples' pre-Easter epistemic limitations and that of contemporary Jews – some of whom would eventually reach enlightenment – combined with Theodore's generally positive appreciation of the Jewish *praeparatio evangelica*, underscores his mitigated supersessionism and understanding of the Jewish predicament and of the Jews' immanent inability to grasp the Messiah's nature. The characteristic elements outlined in this chapter may reflect salient features of the Antiochene, and more broadly Syrian 'Greek way' in its underlying affinities with Syriac-speaking Christianity as represented especially by Aphrahat and Ephrem with its peculiar Jewish baggage. This can also be part of an explanation of Theodore's outstanding reception by Eastern Syrian Christianity. In light of what is portrayed by Theodore as an overlap between the disciples' limitations and those of the Jews, one may also suppose that the Jewish cognitive deficiency here in fact reflects internal Christian doubts vis-à-vis contemporary complicated elaborations introduced into christological discourse.

PART 2
SYRIAC CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN A SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN CULTURAL SETTING

CHAPTER FIVE:
SYRIAC AND RABBINIC NARRATIVES ON ZOROASTRIAN ORAL CULTURE: THE CASE OF A PERSIAN CONVERT

Recent research has shown increasing interest in the possibility of actual or indirect links between Babylonian Jewry of the Talmudic period and contemporaneous Syriac Christianity.[1] Geographical and cultural affinity – e.g., the Aramaic (Syriac) language shared by both entities – strongly suggest the possibility of such links and prompt investigation of the boundary-drawing polemical strategies employed by each side.[2] The present chapter, however, relates to a

[1] The spectrum of existing appraisals of these links (from actual influence all the way to the *Zeitgeist*), the methodological problems involved and possible ways of resolving them have been recently discussed in Adam Becker, 'The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians,' *AJS Review* 34.1 (2010), pp. 91–113. For an earlier discussion of the material in this chapter, see R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, 'Zoroastrian Proselyte in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives: Orality-Related Markers of Cultural Identity,' *History of Religions* 51.2 (2011), pp.197–218.

[2] See, for example, J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden, 1971); S. Brock, 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979), pp. 212–232; B. L. Visotzky, 'Three Syriac Cruxes,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991), pp. 167–175; G. Stemberger, 'Contacts between Christian and Jewish Exegesis in the Roman Empire,' in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. I/1: *Antiquity* (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 569–586; N. Koltun-Fromm, 'A Jewish-Christian Conversation

complementing avenue of identity shaping derived from another salient feature shared by Jews and Christians (and Manichaeans) of the period and the region – namely, their status as religious minorities in the Sasanian Empire. It thus deals with the somewhat parallel apologetic strategies employed by the two minority groups, vis-à-vis the empire's dominant Zoroastrian elite.[3] Whereas the attitude of the authorities may in general be characterized as one of tolerance, the changing political situation – i.e., the Christianization of the Roman Empire and of Armenia – engendered tensions and, sometimes, dramatic shifts in policy.[4] This minority-majority tension provides a backdrop for our investigation which focuses on a comparative analysis of rabbinic and Syriac Christian narratives about Persians leaving their 'natural' and dominant tradition in order to embrace the 'true' minority faith – Judaism or Christianity.[5] It appears that although Zoroastrianism could be

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in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996), pp. 45–63; 'Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of Jewish-Christian Polemic,' in J. Frishman and L. van Rompay (eds), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretations* (Louvain, 1997), pp. 57–72; S. Naeh, 'Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and Its Syriac Background,' in Frishman and Van Rompay (eds), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretations*, pp. 73–89; A. Kofsky and S. Ruzer, 'Logos, Holy Spirit and Messiah: Aspects of Aphrahat's Theology Reconsidered,' *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 73 (2007), pp. 347–378.

[3] See recently Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia: The Cave of Treasures in Context*.

[4] For discussion and further bibliography, see G. Herman, '"Bury my Coffin Deep!" Zoroastrian Exhumation in Jewish and Christian Sources,' in J. Roth, M. Schmelzer and Y. Francus (eds), *Tiferet le-Israel: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus* (New York, 2009), pp. 31–32.

[5] The protagonists of the stories discussed below are perceived there as representing the Iranian culture/religion. See Y. Elman, 'The Other in the Mirror: Iranians and Jews View One Another: Questions of Identity, Conversion and Exogamy in the Fifth-Century Iranian Empire: Part 1,' *The Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2009) (*Iranian and Zoroastrian Studies in Honor of Oktor Skjærvø*), pp. 15–25; Y. Elman, 'The Other in the Mirror:

perceived as equivalent to paganism, the Persians at that time exercised a considerable attraction for both Jews and Christians as an important Other.[6]

In the discussion that follows we ask, inter alia, whether the Jewish and Christian Syriac stories share the same stereotype of

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Iranians and Jews View One Another: Questions of Identity, Conversion and Exogamy in the Fifth-Century Iranian Empire: Part 2,' *The Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 20 (2010), pp. 25–46. For conversion of Iranians to Judaism and Christianity, as well as of non-Iranians to Zoroastrianism, see S. Shaked, 'Religion in the Late Sassanian Period: Eran, Aneran, and other Religious Designations,' in C. V. Sarkhosh and S. Stewart (eds), *The Sasanian Era*, The Idea of Iran 3 (London, 2008), p. 107, n. 18. It has been argued that the Jewish communities of Sasanian Babylonia had a large numbers of proselytes; see, for example, B. J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York, 1968[2]), pp. 306–309. But see I. Gafny, 'Proselytes and *Giyyur* in the Sasanian Babylon,' in M. Stern (ed.), *Nation and History: Studies in the History of the Jewish People* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 197–209, who sees Jewish missionary activity in the 4th century as mostly limited to Mahoza near Ktesifon. A recent study by Yaakov Elman offers a fresh appraisal of the issue. However, the case of Jewish proselytism discussed below belongs – at least, from the point of view of the narrator – to the period preceding 4th–5th century developments at Mahoza. See Elman, 'The Other in the Mirror: Part 2,' pp. 30–31.

[6] See, for example, the Story of Īšōʿsabran, below, and the story of the martyrdom of Tarbo (S. P. Brock and S. Ashbrook Harvey [eds], *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, [Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1998], pp. 73–76) discussed in N. V. Pigulevskaya, *The Culture of the Syrians in the Middle Ages* (Moscow, 1979), pp. 193–196, as well as in P. Bedjan (ed.), *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha et trois autres Patriarches, d'un prêtre et deux laïques nestoriens* (Paris and Leipzig, 1895), pp. 210–223. As for the poignant question of conversions to Zoroastrianism, Gherardo Gnoli argued for Mazdaism's inability to give a convincing answer to the common anxieties of the time *(The Idea of Iran: An Essay of Its Origin* [Rome and Leiden, 1989], p. 159, n. 7). Shaul Shaked argued, however, for the Sasanian Mazdaism being a viable religious option (*Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* [London, 1994], pp. 2–3). See also A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (Louven, 1958–1988), vol. 1, pp. 223–229.

Persian cultural peculiarities and whether they confirm – and to which extent – the portrayal of a Persian provided by other available sources. Our main objective, however, will be to clarify the notions reflected in the narratives in question, of written and oral paths of learning and authority, and the raison d'être for the study of Scripture suggested there. This discussion will, in turn, inform us with regard to the strategies for construing the Persian Other employed by the two minority groups.

A PERSIAN OUTSIDER AND TWO JEWISH SAGES

The first narrative to be reviewed appears in the relatively late Palestinian midrash *Kohelet Rabbah* (7.8):[7]

> 'Better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit' (Eccl 7:8). A Persian (חד פרסי) came to Rav and told him: Teach me the Torah. He (Rav) told him: Say (on this) *aleph*. He (the Persian) said: Who says that this is *aleph*? Others would say it is not! Rav then told him: Say (on that) *beth*. The Persian asked him: Who says this is *beth*? Rav rebuked him and drove him out in anger (בו והוציאו בנזיפה גער). He went to Samuel (Hebrew: *Sh'muel*) and told him: Teach me the Torah. Samuel said to him: Say (on this) *aleph*. He asked: Who says that this is *aleph*. Samuel told him: Say (on that) *beth*. He said: Who says this is *beth*? Samuel took hold of his ear and the man cried out: Oh my ear! Oh my ear! Samuel asked him: Who said this is your ear? The Persian answered: Everyone knows this is my ear. Samuel told him: In the same way, everyone knows that this is *aleph* and that is *beth*. The Persian was immediately silenced and accepted that.

[7] On this midrash, see, for example, L. Grünhut, *Kritische Untersuchung des Midrasch Kohelet Rabbah* (Berlin, 1892); J. Wachten, *Midrasch-Analyse: Strukturen in Midrasch Qohelet Rabbah* (Hildesheim, 1978); M. Hirshman, *Midrash Qohelet Rabbah: Chapters 1–4* (unpubl. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 1983); R. Kiperwasser, *Midrashim on Kohelet: Studies in Their Redaction amd Formation* (unpubl. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2005), pp. 43–72. For the list of *Kohelet Rabbah* manuscripts, see Kiperwasser, 'Midrashim on Kohelet,' Appendix, pp. 63ff.

> Hence, better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit (Eccl 7:8). Better is the forbearance that Samuel displayed with the Persian than the impatience that Rav showed toward him, for otherwise the Persian might have returned to his heathenism (הפרסי לסיאורו חזר). It is thus about him that the Scripture said, 'Better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit' (Eccl 7:8).

This vignette is part of a larger section referring to Eccl 7:8, which contains an additional conversion narrative – that of the well-known Aquilas the Proselyte, where the concern is likewise expressed that the proselyte might return to his earlier religious habits branded as 'deviation' (סיאורו, סורו).[8] The text quoted above is somewhat elliptic; one may, however, reasonably suppose that by calling the protagonist Persian the narrator marks him as a potential convert from Zoroastrianism, since both Iranians and Jews seem to have perceived adherence to their religion as tantamount to fealty to their ethnicity.[9] But why is the Persian having doubts about the letters, and why do the sages react in so violent a fashion? Moreover, what causes the Persian in the end to accept the second sage's teaching? Even if the situation had been meant to be to some extent a humorous one, what exactly was the object of the humor?

Kohelet Rabbah is a Palestinian midrash; its final redaction, however, probably took place in the period when the Jewish Babylonian traditions had begun to spread to the Land of Israel and influence local literary patterns.[10] In this context, it appears to

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[8] The passage had previously not been extensively discussed by scholars, but see recently M. Hirshman, *The Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture, 100 C.E.–350 C.E. Texts on Education and Their Late Antique Context* (Oxford and New York, 2009), pp. 101–105. Though having much in common with Hirshman's analysis, we differ on few specific points.

[9] See Philippe Gignoux's remarks comparing Jewish and Zoroastrian notions of identity in his *Man and Cosmos in Ancient Iran* (Rome, 2001), p. 95; Elman, 'The Other in the Mirror 2,' p. 30. See also S. Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia, 2013).

[10] See Kiperwasser, *Midrashim on Kohelet*, pp. 243–274; R. Kiperwasser, 'Early and Late in *Kohelet Rabbah*: A Study in Redaction-Criticism,' *Iggud – Selected Essays in Jewish Studies* (2008), pp. 291–312.

be of importance that the protagonists of our story are two Jewish Babylonian sages, Rav and Samuel, and an Iranian would-be convert.[11] This particular narrative unit may thus bear witness to the broader phenomenon mentioned above: the redactor of *Kohelet Rabbah* seems to have been well enough familiar with traditions imported by Babylonian tradents.[12]

The story about Rav, Samuel and a Persian (the common appellation for a native Gentile by Babylonian Jews and Christians) – turns out to have a narrative structure similar to that distinguishing the Babylonian Talmud conversion accounts,[13] as attested

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[11] For Rav, the common appellation of Abba Aricha, of the first amoraic generation, and Samuel, see H. Albeck, *Introduction to the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi* (Tel Aviv, 1989[3]), pp. 170–172.

[12] On the beginnings of Babylonian influence on Jewish circles, see M. Margoliot, *The Difference of Opinion between People from the East and the Sons of the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem, 1938), p. 3; Z. Safrai, *The Missing Century: Palestine in the Fifth Century – Growth and Decline* (Louvain, 1998), pp. 54–55; Z. Safrai and A. M. Maeir, "'An Epistle Came From the West": Historical and Archeological Evidence for the Ties Between the Jewish Communities in the Land of Israel and Babylonia During the Talmudic Period,' *Jewish Quarterly Review* 93 (2003), pp. 497–531; E. Fleischer, 'Calendar of Yearly Holidays in a Piyyut by Qilliri,' *Tarbiz* 72 (1983), pp. 253–258; R. Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven, 1998), pp. 110–111.

[13] In the study of ancient Christian literature, the term conversion is commonly applied to stereotypical descriptions of conversions from Judaism or paganism to Christianity. See, e.g., D. E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville, 2003), pp. 111–116; D. L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation*, JSNT Supplement Series 123 (Sheffield, 1996). In rabbinic literature one alternatively encounters stories in which a former Gentile is converted from his *suro* – namely, his gentile religion – to full membership in the Torah-centered community. For the original Jewish usage of the conversion metaphor of transition 'from darkness to light,' see S. Pines, 'From Darkness into Great Light' in G. G. Stroumsa (ed.) *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, vol. 4: *Studies in the History of Religion* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 3–7, esp. p. 4.

in *b. Shab.* 32b and its *Avot de R. Nathan* parallel.[14] There, having been rebuked by the pedantic Shammai, three daring Gentiles appear before Hillel the Elder, who accepts them as converts. Whereas the primary form of this tradition is preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, where it provides an illustration of the opposition between the Shamaitic and Hillelitic modes of behavior,[15] *Avot de R. Nathan* retains a secondary variation engaging an aphorism from the mishnaic treatise *Avot*.[16] We address here only the following conversion episode:

Avot de R. Natan A 15[17]	*b. Shabbat* 31 a[18]	*Avot de R. Natan* B 29[19]
The story is told: A certain man once stood before Shammai and said to him: 'Master, how many Torahs have	Our rabbis taught: A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him: 'How many Torahs have you?'	The story is told of one who came to Shammai the Elder. He asked him: 'Rabbi, how many Torahs have been given from heaven?' He said: 'One in

[14] Although *Avot d. R. Nathan* is a midrash of Palestinian provenance, the late date of its composition allows for possible Babylonian influence. See M. Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Text, Redaction and Interpretation* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 208–222.

[15] See J. L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories, Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore and London, 1999), p. 150.

[16] See Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, p. 133.

[17] *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, ed. S. Schechter (Vienna, 1887), p. 60; cf. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan: synoptische Edition beider Versionen*, ed. H.-J. Becker (Tübingen, 2006), p. 158. The English translation follows that by J. Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven and London, 1955), p. 80.

[18] We follow the English translation of The Babylonian Talmud edited by I. Epstein (London, 1952), pp. 139–140.

[19] Schechter, *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, pp. 61–62 (cf, Becker, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, p. 362). The English translation is based on A. J. Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Natan, Version B: Translation and Commentary* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 174–175, with minor changes.

you?'

'Two,' Shammai said, 'one written and one oral.'

Said the man: 'With the written one I trust you, with the oral one, I trust you not (אני מאמין לך את שבכתב את שבעל פה איני מאמין לך).'[20]

Shammai scolded him and dismissed him with a rebuke (גער בו והוציאו בנזיפה).

He came before Hillel and said to him: 'Master, how many Torahs were given?'

'Two,' Hillel said, 'one written and one oral.'

Said the man: 'The written one I am prepared to accept, the oral one I am not prepared to accept. He said to him: 'My

He said: 'Two, the written Torah and the oral Torah.' 'I believe you with respect to the written, but not with respect to the oral Torah (אני מאמינך – שבכתב ושבעל פה - איני מאמינך). Make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the written Torah <only>.' He scolded him and dismissed him with a rebuke (גער בו והוציאו בנזיפה).

When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte.

writing and one orally.' The man said: 'I only believe you about the one given in writing, but I do not believe you about the one given orally (אני מאמינך אלא זו שנתנה בכתב אבל זו שנתנה בפה איני מאמינך).' Shammai scolded him and sent him away with a rebuke (גער בו וסלקו בנזיפה).

He came into Hillel's presence and asked him: 'Rabbi, how many Torahs were given from heaven?' He said: 'One in writing and one orally.' The man said: 'I only believe you about the one given in writing but I do not believe you about the one given orally.'

[20] An interesting pun can be observed here: אני מאמין לך (*ani maamin lekha*, 'I trust you') – (*eni maamin lekha*, 'I trust you not'). Hirshman (*Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture*, p. 103) discerns a number of additional paranomastic elements in another rabbinic education-centered story.

son, sit down.'

He wrote out the alphabet for him and asked him: 'What is this?' 'It is *aleph*,' the man said.

Said Hillel: 'This is not *aleph* but *beth*. What is that?' The man said: 'It is *beth*.' 'This is not *beth*,' said Hillel, 'but *gimmel*.' And then he said to him: 'How do you know that this is *aleph* and this *beth* and this *gimmel*? Even as you have taken this in good faith, so take the other in good faith (קבל עליך זו באמונה).'

On the first day he taught him: *Aleph*, *beth*, *gimmel*, *daleth*.

The following day he reversed them to him. 'But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,' he protested.

'Must you then not rely upon me? Then rely upon me with respect to the oral Torah too.'

Hillel wrote out the alphabet for him and asked him: 'What is this?' He said: '*Aleph*.' 'What is this?' He said: '*Beth*.' Hillel asked him: 'Who proved to you that this is *aleph* and that is *beth*?' He said: 'I took it on faith.' Hillel said: 'Just as you took this on faith so you should take that on faith (א"ל קבלתי כך עלי באמונה. א"ל כשם שקבלת זו עליך באמונה כך תקבל [את זו עליך [באמונה]).'

The man said: 'Your impatience, Shammai, (almost) made me remove my soul from the life of this world and the life of the world to come; and your patience, Hillel, made me worthy to inherit the life of this world and the life of the world to come.'

Unlike in *Kohelet Rabbah*, the story here is projected to a distant past and, accordingly, supplied with a Palestinian setting with forbearing Hillel and rigorous Shammai as the main Jewish protagonists. There is also no indication that the would-be proselyte is a Persian.[21] Still, one may observe substantial structural overlaps with the tradition discussed earlier, overlaps that seem to point to a

[21] For an opposite appraisal, see Hirshman, *Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture*, p. 102.

shared prototype: A potential convert begins his religious quest with a more pedantic sage and only later, having been rebuked and rejected, approaches the sympathetic one. It is reasonable that the stereotypical ending also belongs to the inherited traditional strata of the story. While alphabet-centered literacy might have featured prominently already in the prototypical pattern, in the Babylonian Talmud it is idiosyncratically perceived as representing knowledge of the Oral Torah. The latter has been transmitted from one generation to another, as exemplified, inter alia, in the received knowledge of the letters' form and meaning.

It stands to reason that the prototypical narrative nucleus in question was originally formatted with two prominent 3rd-century Babylonian opponents, Rav and Samuel, and was later transposed by the editors of the Babylonian Talmud to an ancient Palestinian setting with Hillel and Shammai as the protagonists. The Palestinian *Kohelet Rabbah* would then reflect here an earlier, Babylonian, stage in the development of the tradition which 'had migrated' to Palestine. As for the transformation carried out here by the Babylonian editors – namely, creating a link with much earlier Jewish authoritative figures – it is typical of their redactional approach.[22] Moreover, such an attribution – of a comparatively recent tradition to 'ancient' authorities – is a common trait of traditional thinking also outside Jewish culture.[23] At the same time, the broader narrative unit providing, in the Babylonian Talmud, the

[22] A similar phenomenon is described by M. Benovitz, *Talmud Ha-Igud: BT Berakhot, Chapter 1, With Comprehensive Commentary* (Jerusalem, 2006), p. 441. For an illuminating example of a Palestinian source that preserves a Babylonian tradition concerning Persian culture, see E.-S. Rosenthal, 'For the Talmudic Dictionary – Talmudica Iranica,' in S. Shaked and A. Netzer (eds), *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages*, vol. 1, (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 48–49.

[23] See C. Hezser, 'The Codification of Legal Knowledge in Late Antiquity: The Talmud Yerushalmi and Roman Law Codes,' in P. Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* (Tübingen, 1998), pp. 612, 628–629, 633–636.

framework for our story remains non-attributed – a feature characteristic of a late redaction.[24]

Returning to *Kohelet Rabbah*, the Persian there asks to be taught Torah, which, even if the halakhic implications are not spelled out, appears to imply a request for conversion.[25] In accordance with the prototypical pattern, the prospective convert first approaches the pedantic Rav, and only afterwards, having failed, comes to the empathetic Samuel. It is illuminating that from the sage's point of view it is crystal clear that the process of Torah study must begin with a study of the letters which points to the reading-skills based education. The Babylonian Talmud parallel here provides corroborative evidence: Hillel the Elder also starts teaching the fresh convert Torah by instructing him in the Hebrew letters ('When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day he taught him: *aleph*, *beth*, *gimmel*, *daleth*'). In both cases, the sage himself conducts this initial phase of instruction rather than referring the convert to a school or a junior instructor. This method of first teaching even adult beginners the alphabet is a commonplace of the Talmudic narratology, as exemplified by the emphasis on the late start in the story of R. Aqiva's schooling. Aqiva is said to have started his education together with his son, who was just old enough for his first school year. The narrative further recounts that 'the teacher wrote down the alphabet for him (R. Aqiva). And he studied it from *aleph* to *taw*, and he learned it.'[26] An early witness for this educational method is

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[24] For a recent discussion, see J. L. Rubenstein (ed.), *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada* (Tübingen, 2005), and particularly Rubenstein's Introduction and the chapter on 'Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggada' (pp. 417–440). See also J. L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore and London, 2003).

[25] See M. Finkelstein, *Conversion: Halakhah and Practice* (tr. from Hebrew by Edward Levin; Ramat Gan, 2006), pp. 195–198.

[26] See *Avot de R. Nathan* A 6 (ed. Schechter, pp. 28–29; trans. Goldin, p. 41). The same motif appears in the pair of *Avot de R. Nathan* A 15 conversion stories mentioned above. Interesting is that *Kohelet R.* and *b. Shab.* mention 'saying the alphabet,' whereas *Avot de R. Nathan* speaks of

found in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (ca 125 CE),[27] where an attempt by Joseph at young Jesus' systematic education begins with teaching him letters, which tellingly sets Jesus and his instructor on a collision course. This motif is attested in the Syriac recension of the same *Infancy Gospel*,[28] as well as elsewhere in Syriac literature.[29] It seems that Syriac elementary education did, in fact, start with teaching the letters.[30]

In *Kohelet Rabbah*, the attempt to teach the Persian the Hebrew letter *aleph* encountered opposition from the potential convert. He asked a question that could sound rude or ironic but might actually have had something to do with his cultural background. His doubts concerning the lack of certitude with regard to the meaning and/or pronunciation of the letters might have reflected a situation characteristic of his native culture. As is known, Middle Persian used the Aramaic characters, some of which acquired a number of various readings. However, the historical background for this

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'writing the alphabet' – the former being a characteristic Babylonian terminology and the latter a Palestinian one. For an elaboration on the pedagogical value of learning the alphabet, see *b. Shab.* 104a. On learning the alphabet as the initial step in Jewish youth education in late antiquity vis-à-vis Hellenistic culture, see Y. Gafny, 'On Children's Education in the Talmudic Era: Tradition and Reality,' in I. Etkes and R. Feldhay (eds), *Education and History: Cultural and Political Contexts* (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 63–78.

[27] *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (*IGT*) 6, 14. For the manuscript evidence of *IGT*, see W. Schneelmelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1 (London, 1991), pp. 439–443. (cf. the Syriac version of *The Legend of Ahikar* 36).

[28] Note the proximity between the later rabbinic 'Who says that this is aleph? (מן יימר דהוא אלף)' and 'What is *aleph*' (ܡܢ ܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܐܠܦ) in the Syriac version of *IGT* 14.

[29] See, for example, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary and The History of the Likeness of Christ which the Jews of Tiberias Made to Mock At*, 2 vols., ed. E. A. W. Budge (London, 1899), vol. 2, pp. 72–73; cf. the Syriac version of *The Legend of Ahikar* 36.

[30] See Pigulevskaya, *The Culture of the Syrians*, pp. 38–41.

phonetic uncertainty remains disputed.[31] Or alternatively, as one coming from a culture with a strong emphasis on orality, he might have been inclined to focus on the study of word units rather than letters: While the former are crucial for the transmission of a culture's religious content, the latter are mainly of interest to scribes, who need to expertly write contracts. That until the Islamic period Iranians retained strong reservations about putting things into writing is duly attested in their literary sources. Thus one learns from *Denkard* V 24.13 (9th century): 'The legitimacy of [the] oral tradition is thus in many respects greater than that of writing. And it is logical, for many other reasons as well, to consider the living and oral Word as more essential than the written one.'[32] We return to this below.

Whatever the case, the intention of the Persian in the story seems clear: If everything you know about your religion is gleaned from a written text – how can you be sure that your understanding is right and not conditioned by the wrong ways of reciting the Holy Writ. The Persian thus aims to clarify a crucial issue: Is the sacral tradition of the Jews based on a trustworthy oral tradition, or do they have to rely only on an unreliable written text?

It is noteworthy that *Kohelet Rabbah* presents Rav, who, though a native of Babylonia had spent many years in Palestine, as unwilling to relate to the amazement of the Persian and reacting angrily. On the other hand, Samuel, who seems to have been more pro-Iranian in his cultural inclinations, might have properly grasped the nature of the problem.[33] Of course, such a polar representation

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[31] See, for example, P. Huyse, 'Late Sasanian Society Between Orality and Literacy,' in V. S. Curtis and S. Stewart (eds), *The Sasanian Era*, The Idea of Iran 3 (London, 2008), pp. 144–149. Our uncertainty regarding the dating of the *Kohelet Rabbah* redaction should also not be overlooked. Therefore suggestions regarding the possible phonetic background of the Persian's doubts remain hypothetical.

[32] The citation is according to Huyse, 'Late Sasanian Society,' p. 143. See C. Cereti, *La Letteratura Pahlavi: Introduzione ai testi con riferimenti alla storia degli studi e alla tradizione manoscritta* (Milan, 2001), pp. 41–78.

[33] Y. Elman, 'Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal

of the two sages' attitudes could to a large extent derive from the ongoing rivalry between the two schools they represented. Samuel's use of a common, albeit mildly violent, method of instruction aims at drawing the student's attention to the undeniable certainty of his own body. Unlike the external social context, prone to change, the body is intrinsically a person's own and the pain comes from within.[34] Generally, texts could be furnished with different, and mostly mistaken, meanings through their faulty recitation; even the letters of these texts could be mispronounced and thus attributed a false meaning by an inexperienced stranger. The letters of the holy tongue, however, have meaning immanent to them, and the collective memory kept by generations of scholars is a strong guarantee that the appropriate meaning of the texts, words and letters is sustained – *inter alia*, everyone in fact knows what *aleph* is.[35] The pain in the ear of the Persian proselyte was intended therefore to illustrate the relation of the Torah letters to the Torah itself – the letters are the organs of the body of Scripture.[36]

Traditions,' in C. E. Fonrobert and M. S. Jaffee (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 174–175.

[34] But see Hirshman (*Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture*, p. 103), who perceives Samuel's argument here as appealing rather to the conventional nature of the language – namely, as all agree that the ear should be called ear, the name of the letter *aleph* is likewise a matter of general convention. A violent reaction on the part of the instructor is also attested in the Syriac version of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 14.

[35] T. Weiss, 'The Perception of Letters in the Samaritan "Memar Marqah" and its Equivalence in Rabbinic Sources and in the Book of Creation,' *Jewish Studies* 43 (2005–2006), pp. 89–130; T. Weiss, 'Three Traditions of the Creation of the World from Letters,' *Kabbalah – Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 17 (2008), pp. 169–200.

[36] See Weiss, 'The Perception of Letters,' pp. 106–114. Alternatively, as suggested by Amram Tropper (personal communication), the ear here may have been chosen because it is a specific organ used for hearing and, thus, learning. The sage, then, wanted to emphasize that language belongs to the public sphere of common knowledge and not to the personal fancy of an individual. Just as the Persian had once trusted the teachers, from

In contradistinction to the pattern attested in *Avot de R. Nathan* A and B, and *b. Shab.* 31a, the oral Torah motif is not found in *Kohelet Rabbah* in this context. The letters are rather portrayed here as practical devices, transmitted by the scholarly tradition and tailored to inculcate a proper and sure comprehension of the written Torah. The traditional knowledge conveyed by the letters is as certain and unmistaken as the perception of one's body. This may be one more indication of a secondary character of the letters becoming the paradigm of the faithful transmission of the traditional *oral* Torah-related knowledge as exemplified in the above triple tradition. Furthermore, in none of our sources is a midrashic or symbolic meaning of the letters suggested – in contradistinction to a seemingly old pattern reflected, for example, already in the *Infancy Story of Thomas* 6, 14, and resurfacing in later rabbinic sources.[37]

It may be suggested that the rabbinic story attested in *Avot de R. Nathan* A and B and *b. Shab.* 31a – ostensibly relating to a move toward conversion – also presupposes partial acceptance of the commandments; in other words, this is what the course of study imposed on the newcomer is supposed to lead to.[38] The narrative, however, does not spell out this theme, focusing instead on the learning itself as the only way to become a *religious insider*. In *Avot de R. Nathan* this is emphatically linked to the oral tradition, which is elsewhere described as the 'divine mystery' (מסטורין של הקב"ה).[39] It has been argued that in some contexts the sages' emphasis on orality functioned as an identity marker vis-à-vis Christianity, which

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whom he received his native education, so too he should now trust a 'native' Hebrew speaker teaching him a new language.

[37] See, for example, E. Yassif's critical edition of *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 199–202. It deserves notice that the Greek of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 6 (not attested in the surviving Syriac version) and *Avot de R. Nathan* seem to share terminology describing the beginner's *trust* (or distrust) in his instructor.

[38] See Finkelstein, *Conversion: Halakhah and Practice*, pp. 195–198.

[39] Cf. See *Tanchuma* (ed. S. Buber) Vayera 6 and *Tanchuma* Vayera 5.

was perceived as adopting the written Scripture only[40] – namely, presenting its message as (a) Scripture-centered and (b) being in conflict with contemporaneous Jewish post-Scriptural oral tradition.[41] Our case indicates that the issue of orality functions as an identity marker in polemical literary settings of border drawing, not only between Jews and Christians but also between Jews and other Others.[42] We will further on highlight the difference in the orality-related strategies employed vis-à-vis Christians and Zoroastrians.

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We turn now to evidence of a different kind – a Syriac Christian composition, the *Life of Īšōʿsabran*, penned by the Catholicos *Īšōʿyahb* III in the mid-seventh century.[43] Though referring to events that

[40] See I. Yuval, 'The Orality of Jewish Oral Law: From Pedagogy to Ideology,' in L. Gall and D. Willoweit (eds), *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts* (Munich, 2011), pp. 237–260.

[41] See, for example, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 66–67, 71, 84.

[42] It goes without saying that the language of 'mystery' employed by Jews in a conversion context might have been influenced by broader religious patterns characteristic of late antiquity. It is instructive, however, that in the rabbinic tradition quoted above this mystery aspect is already fully internalized as a core Jewish motif. Cf. A. Tropper, 'On the Meaning of "You set them aside with a reed" and "It is impossible to turn you away empty" in the Literature of the Sages,' *Netuim: A Journal for the Studies in the Oral Torah* 16 (2010), pp. 9–31, esp. 28–31.

[43] Ca. 620 CE; see M. J.-B. Chabot, 'Histoire de Jésus-Sabran, écrite par Jésus-Yab d'Adiabène,' *Archives des missions scientifiques et littèraires* 7 (1897), pp. 503–584; Preface and French abstract: pp. 485–502, esp. 501; F. Jullien, 'Parcours à travers l'*Histoire d'Išoʿsabran*, martyr sous Khosrau II,' *Res Orientales* 16 (2004), pp. 171–183. See also M.-L. Chaumont, 'Recherches sur le clergé zoroastrien,' *La Revue de l'histoire des religions* 158 (1960), pp. 63–64; Pigulevskaya, *The Culture of the Syrians*, pp. 40–41; J. Greenfield, 'Ratin Magosha,' in S. B. Hoenig and L. D. Stitskin (eds), *Joshua Finkel Festschrift* (New York, 1974), pp. 63–69; A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133 (Leiden and New York, 1997), pp. 72–73; A.

took place a few decades earlier, before the Muslim conquest, the treatise may also have been reacting to the new realities and the demise of Zoroastrian rule.[44] A comparison with the rabbinic narratives is appropriate and holds promise, since (a) the relationship between Syriac Christians of Mesopotamia and Babylonian – and to a certain extent also Palestinian – Jews was characterized by a closeness of both spoken and written languages, and thus shared linguistic and cultural patterns; (b) we are dealing in both cases with Bible-oriented cultures, which hold literacy in high esteem; and (c) both minorities respond to challenges of the dominant Persian culture, perceived as based on orality, by contrasting it to their own salient cultural traits. One should therefore expect the issue of orality to feature prominently in the minority groups' border-drawing strategies.[45]

It deserves notice, even if only in passing, that somewhat similarly to what we know about Babylonian Jewry with its academies and the whole concept of religion as an educational system, contemporaneous Syriac Christians seem to have put great emphasis on 'pedagogical ideology,' establishing a number of outstanding centers of religious education. Recent research has duly emphasized their perception of Christianity as a form of learning.[46] The inter-religious polemic was correspondingly portrayed in terms of a disputation among scholars – e.g., at the imperial court of Shappur II (or I)[47] or during occasional encounters in the neutral public domain – with each side supposedly representing its own

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H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom* (Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 205–206; S. Secunda, 'Studying with a Magus Like Giving a Tongue to a Wolf,' *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2009), pp. 151–157.

[44] As suggested by Geoffrey Herman (personal communication).

[45] For the rabbinic milieu, see for instance, Y. Elman, 'Orality and the Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud,' *Oral Tradition* 14.1 (1999), pp. 52–99.

[46] See Becker, *Fear of God*, pp. 22–31.

[47] See Elman, 'Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages,' pp. 165–197, esp. 166–168 (following S. Saked, 'A Persian House of Study, A King's Secretary: Irano-Aramaic Notes,' *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientarium Hungaricae* 48 [1995], pp. 171–186).

school. Syriac writers tended to emphasize the difference between their school tradition and those of the Greeks, Zoroastrians and others who failed to follow the pattern established in the very beginning (in the heavenly academy) by God himself and later reestablished at various key points in the history of salvation – the schools of Abel, Noah, Abraham and Moses, the steward of the great school of perfect philosophy.[48] According to such a perception, this ideal educational pattern was eventually revived by Jesus and continued by the apostles, the school of Alexandria and so on, until the schools of Edessa and Nisibis.[49] In a sense then one may see the story that follows as depicting what happens when a Persian enters a polemically disposed Syriac 'study space.' It should be emphasized, however, that as in the rabbinic stories reviewed above, we are not dealing here with an established 'academy of learning' but rather with a private 'study session.'[50]

THE STORY OF MY MASTER ĪŠŌʿSABRAN (ܠܐܚܕܐ ܘܒܙܒܢ ܗܘ ܕܗܘܐ ܒܪ)[51]

> At that time, as the blessed Īšōʿsabran was at the height of righteous behavior and was walking in his mortal body upon the earth as if in heaven, the thought of martyrdom sprang up in his heart again… He applied the strength of his contemplation to martyrdom for the sake of the Messiah….'I would rather return to the house and the place of contest (ܐܓܘܢܐ, Gr. ἀγών, ἀγωνία) so that if the grace summons me, I will be found ready.'[52] In the vigilance of the strengthened

[48] See Becker, *Fear of God*, p. 99; cf. the rabbinic tradition about the academies of Shem and Ever, e.g., *Gen. R.* 63.10.

[49] *Mar Barḥadbšabba ʿArbaya, Cause de la fondaion des écoles* 362.13–367.79, ed. A. Scher (Paris, 1908); see Becker, *Fear of* God, pp. 99–100.

[50] See Becker, 'Comparative Study of "Scholasticism",' pp. 95–96.

[51] Chabot, pp. 523–525.

[52] For the imagery of contest applied to martyrdom in Jewish sources, see, for example, Y. Levinson, 'The Athlete of Faith: Bloody Plots and Plots Imagined,' *Tarbiẓ* 68.1 (1989), pp. 61–86.

thought, he then hurried down from the solitude of the mountains to the theater of the world (ܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܘܒܗܘ ܐܬܚܙܐ).

He thought that he should devise and put upon himself an invincible armor of the Holy Scriptures' spiritual iron, the one that would not only be catching the arrows [shot] by those who adhere to false worship but would also cause delight to the eyes of contemplation through divine knowledge. Having considered that, he approached the very priest who loved him (ܗܘ ܟܗܢܐ ܕܪܚܡ ܠܗ ܘܗܘ ܐܠܦ ܠܗ) and was his teacher, and the priest had a young son, whose name was Īšōʿzaka. The blessed (Īšōʿsabran) beseeched him (the priest), saying: 'If it seems good to you, O master, give me this youth to be my beloved brother and son in the capacity of teacher and instructor in the divine scriptures (ܒܟܬܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܐܢܐ ܠܗ ܠܝ ܠܐܚ ܘܒܪ ܘܠܡܠܦ ܠܗ ܘܠܡܫܕܪ ܠܗ).'[53] The priest then answered him most lovingly, saying: '….Let him therefore be for you as you requested… Your wish is in every way helpful to the community. Thus have possession of my Īšōʿzaka as you need.'

When the blessed man's wish was granted, he immediately put the youth to the task of teaching and, when they were together, asked him, what would be right for a person to study first from the Covenant (ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܝܠܦ ܠܐ ܢܫ). And the youth replied that one should first of all learn the letters (ܐܬܘܬܐ), then their (proper) vocalization (ܦܣܩܐ). After that one should learn psalms (ܡܙܡܘܪܐ) and little by little he would read all the Scriptures (ܟܠ ܟܬܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ), and after he has been instructed in the Scriptures, he should approach their interpretation (ܘܒܗܝ ܒܬܪ ܕܝܠܦ ܠܗ ܘܡܫܕܪ ܠܗ ܠܦܫܪܢܘܬܐ). But the blessed man said to the youth: 'In the meantime, until I finish trying to learn the letters, teach me ten

[53] The appellation 'son' repeatedly used here prompted Becker (*Fear of God*, p. 205) to view the passage as indicating a kind of legal adoption of the young instructor by Īšōʿsabran. The text, however, is not explicit and the issue is thus in need of further clarification. There might have existed a Persian perception of the educational process as taking place within the nuclear family; see J. R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, Mass. 1987), p. 297.

> psalms.' He said that because he had been used to grasp orally (by word of mouth) (ܒܥܠ ܦܘܡ ܡܢ ܫܡܥܬܐ) the mumbling of the magi (*retna da-mgushutha*, ܪܬܢܐ ܕܡܓܘܫܘܬܐ), as the teaching of Zoroaster is not written down in intelligible characters (ܠܐ ܓܠܝܢ ܒܟܬܒܐ). And he tried to convince the youth that he would rather grasp things from hearing (ܒܥܐ ܡܫܡܥܬܐ). And trying to take hold of a saying he was laboring vigorously – shaking his head (moving his neck back and forward, ܡܙܝܙ ܒܪܫܗ) in the manner of the magi (ܐܝܟ ܡܓܘܫܐ). The youth, however, did not let him do that, saying: 'You should not act as the magi do, but rather remain quiet and let only your mouth speak. This way, you are going to grasp many things in a short time.'
>
> The two of them came and told the priest about (all) that. And the priest convinced him to learn the letters first, as it is from them that the reading of all the Scriptures will become possible. He was convinced, accepted that and within a few days learned the letters and went through ten psalms and three or four of the minor liturgical responses. He also (learned) how to arrange all the evening and morning services and frequently performed his prayers with great fervor.

As in the story in *Kohelet Rabbah*, the instructor intends to begin with the learning of the letters of the alphabet, whereas the newcomer – a product of Persian cultural background – is keen on gaining knowledge of the Scriptures by means of oral instruction and memorizing. In both the Jewish and the Syriac Christian narratives, the stranger's introduction to the study of the Holy Writ clearly marks an initiation of sorts. In *Kohelet Rabbah*, we are dealing with an undecided *Judaisant* contemplating the possibility of becoming a member of the rabbinic community. In the Syriac story, the course of study, although disconnected from conversion proper – as the beginning of the quoted passage indicates, Īšōʿsabran had not only embraced Christianity earlier but already adopted an ascetic way of life[54] – is supposed to prepare him for the future polemical battle with Zoroastrians and, eventually, martyrdom. The Syriac narrative thus explicitly presents two

[54] See also Chabot, pp. 509–517, 521–523.

distinct phases of the conversion process, with the first detached from schooling in the Scriptures; in this it is at variance with the rabbinic version relating to one foundational phase only – that of Torah study.

Correspondingly, the status and role of the initiates in the two narratives differ considerably. The Persian of the midrash is still an outsider who, even further on, having succumbed to Samuel's body-oriented argument, remains a shadowy figure destined mainly to highlight the vantage points of the sage's approach. By contrast, Īšōʿsabran is portrayed as an already accomplished Christian ascetic; moreover, he is in fact the main protagonist of the whole story, the one who is supposed to bring the Christian mission to his former Zoroastrian brethren. That an ascetic, having reached a high level of perfection, should return to the world seems to have been an important *topos* of Syriac hagiography.[55] Unlike that widespread *topos*, however, Īšōʿsabran's mission in the 'theater of the world' is not supposed to serve his fellow Christians but to be directed at the Zoroastrian Other. Nothing of the kind is expected from the convert of the rabbinic tale, who, as noted, remains a marginal figure. Accordingly, the threatening Zoroastrian setting is vividly present in the Syriac story, whereas in the Jewish account it remains a dim and distant reality hinted at only in the mention of the convert's possible relapse. Whatever the true scope of Jewish missionary activity among the Persians and the actual number of recruited proselytes,[56] it may be cautiously suggested that the above difference reflects to a certain extent – in addition to the obvious difference of the genre between the rabbinic and the Syriac narratives – a difference in the 'outreach strategies' employed by

[55] An illuminating example is provided by the story of *Symeon of Emesa*, which, though written in Greek, is of Syrian provenance. See L. Rydén, *Das Leben des heiligen Narren Symeon von Leontios von Neapolis* (Stockholm, 1963); D. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's 'Life' and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley, 1996).

[56] See Gafny, 'Proselytes and *Giyyur* in the Sasanian Babylon'; Elman, 'The Other in the Mirror 2,' pp. 32–33.

the Jewish and Syriac Christian communities, respectively, with the former characterized by a more 'introverted' stance.[57]

The disparity in the protagonists' status seems to have found its expression also in the measure of estrangement from the normative tradition ascribed to each. In the rabbinic source the would-be proselyte expresses substantial doubts about the reliability of the transmission of the written sacred text; moreover, a concern is voiced that he might return to his 'former ways.' In the Syriac story, no such heretical hesitation is ascribed to Īšōʿsabran, who merely believes, somewhat naively, that the oral technique of memorizing will be more effective. This is, in fact, the only point of contention, and a minor one; and the old priest's intervention – being portrayed in friendlier terms than that of the rabbinic sages – as well as the outcome of the episode, prove the effectiveness of the literacy-centered learning.

Īšōʿsabran, therefore, asked his instructor to recite ten psalms to him and then immediately repeated them loudly while shaking his head back and forth – the custom he had inherited from his Zoroastrian milieu. He was duly reprimanded not to behave in this way but to learn Scripture as a Christian should – by relying on written texts and forgoing wild bodily movements. The narrator defines the above Zoroastrian custom of which he strongly disapproves, as 'mumbling of the magi' (*retna damgushuta*). It is noteworthy that the same derogatory term, referring to an emphasis on oral instruction and memorization of the text without an effort to comprehend its content, is applied in rabbinic literature – with a clear awareness of its initial Zoroastrian setting – in the context of internal polemic as the mark of lack of a proper education (*b. Sotah* 22a):[58]

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[57] See M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 129–153. But see Elman, 'The Other in the Mirror 2,' where he argues that Judaism, as any other religion functioning in the Sasanian Empire, had to have converts to prove its viability in the public sphere.

[58] See Greenfield, 'Ratin Magosha,' p. 69; Rosenthal, 'For the Talmudic Dictionary,' pp. 71–72.

> It has been reported, if one has learnt Scripture and Mishnah but did not attend upon rabbinical scholars… R. Aha b. Jacob says he is a magician (*magosha* = *Persian*). R. Nahman b. Isaac said: The definition of R. Aha b. Jacob appears the most probable; because there is a popular saying: The magician mumbles (*ratin magosha*) and knows not what he says; the reciter recites and knows not what he says (רטין מגושא ולא ידע מאי אמר, תני תנא ולא ידע מאי אמר).

Our Syriac story employs the term *retna damgushuta* in relation to a peculiar body language Īšōʿsabran adopts in the process of memorization – forcefully moving the head back and forth – presented here as characteristic of the magi. According to Īšōʿsabran's young instructor, this is incompatible with the true Christian way of learning; the human body thus showing itself as the 'fundamental site of ritualization.'[59] This boundary-marking motif is peculiar to the *The Story of Īšōʿsabran*, where it enhances other expressions of aversion toward the Persian oral method of learning, which the Syriac narrative shares with the rabbinic sources.[60]

The Jewish version of a Persian's conversion mentions neither the body language of learning nor 'mumbling.' Can one surmise that they were not all that foreign to a Jewish audience and might even have been shared by both cultures? As for body language among the Jews, we have no clear evidence from rabbinic literature, but the 11th century Arabic aithor Abū Mansūr al-Thaʿālibī's description of the bodily movements of the Jews at times of learning and prayer strongly resembles those represented in our story as Zoroastrian habits inherited by Īšōʿsabran.[61] Whatever the case regarding the body language, the folk saying about the 'mumbling of the magi' seems to have been widespread

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[59] Becker, *Fear of God*, p. 206.

[60] As exemplified by *b. Sotah* 22a, where the verbal form of the term is employed (*ratin magosha*). See Greenfield, 'Ratin Magosha.'

[61] See I. Goldziher, 'Arabische Äusserungen über Gebräuche der Juden beim Gebet und Studium,' *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 20 (1871), pp. 178–183.

and was used by rabbis elsewhere for polemically marking the non-verbal language of the Zoroastrian Other.[62]

A few additional features of the narrative deserve a passing notice. First, the Scriptures of Īšōʿsabran's curriculum are here called 'covenant' (ܝܬܩܐ) seemingly pointing to the general Christian usage of Old/New Testament terminology. Second, in contradistinction to the rabbinic narrative, the elderly sage refers Īšōʿsabran to a junior expert (his son).

Compared to the rabbinic pattern, the Syriac story is also distinguished by a strong liturgical emphasis: Prayers central to Christian worship, as well as Psalms, feature as core items on Īšōʿsabran's curriculum. This seems to reflect the basic learning practices, also among children, widespread in the Syriac milieu, differing from the more sophisticated curriculum of Syriac scholastic schools.[63] Before embarking on the process of Christian education, Īšōʿsabran's prayer praxis was limited to the incessant reciting of the *Lord's Prayer* (ܐܒܐ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ ܐܦ ܒܥܡ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܠܐ ܫܒܩ ܠܗ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܟܠ ܫܥܐ) – the core of his ascetic discipline.[64] Now, he memorizes a variety of prayers, which should enable him to conduct all the regular daily services. As for the main

[62] See Greenfield, 'Ratin Magosha.'

[63] See Pigulevskaya, *The Culture of the Syrians*, p. 39; *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd of the Persian and Rabban Bar-ʿIdta*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. E. A. W. Budge (London, 1902), vol. 1, pp. 116–117. On recitation of psalms in Egyptian monasticism, see D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticisms* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 117–128. This pattern also figures prominently in Evagrius of Pontus, whose writings were translated into Syriac and widely read in the monasteries of the East. See R. E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford, 2003), pp. xxxii–xxxiv; Becker, *The Fear of God*, p. 175. See also Becker, 'Comparative Study of "Scholasticism",' p. 103.

[64] On the Christian practice of 'incessant prayer,' see B. Biton-Ashkelony, 'Demons and Prayers: Spiritual Exercises in the Monastic Community of Gaza in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 57.2 (2003), pp. 200–221; B. Biton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 157–182.

part of his curriculum, it focuses exclusively on Scripture (and its necessary interpretation),[65] to be studied – seemingly in accordance with a broader practice – in the following order: (consonant) letters of the alphabet, their proper vocalization, then starting with the Psalms, the entire Scripture and, finally, the necessary interpretative traditions.

ZOROASTRIANS CONSTRUED AS THE OTHER

We have related to Jewish and Syriac Christian perceptions of Zoroastrian peculiarities. Zoroastrians, however, also exercised a strong attraction for a broader range of late antique authors who mentioned some of their salient cultural features. For instance, regarding the method of education, Greek authors tell us that Zoroastrian doctrines were still being mainly transmitted orally even toward the end of the Sasanian era.[66] This seems to fit the Persian's attitude both in our rabbinic story and in the *vita* of Īšōʿsabran.[67] Another illuminating piece of evidence may be gleaned from the Manichean criticism of Zoroastrians – as reflected in the tenth century tractate in Arabic *The Establishment of Proofs for the Prophethood of Our Master Mohammed*, penned by a Mutazilite author (80a):[68]

> Mani took up the Avesta (*al-abastāq*) – this being the book of Zoroaster, the prophet of the Magians, a book that is not in the language of the Persians, nor in any language at all, and nobody knows what it is. It is a mumbling.[69] They (the Zoro-

[65] Cf. M. Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (unpubl. diss., Princeton University, 2009), p. 186.

[66] See de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, pp. 446–451.

[67] For de Jong (ibid., pp. 72–73), the *vita* provides 'possibly the most illuminating reference to Zoroastrian religious education.'

[68] The English quotation follows S. Pines, 'The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source,' in Stroumsa (ed.), *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, vol. 4, p. 277.

[69] *Zamzama*; a term applied to the mode of recitation characteristic of the Zoroastrians (Pines, ibid., n. 13). See M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A*

> astrians) recite the words (of the Avesta) without knowing what they mean.[70] Mani claimed that he was the Messenger of Light, and he composed for them (things full of) ignorance and said: this is the interpretation (*tafsir*) of the Avesta. The common people wanted this, and he enjoyed great popularity among them.

One finds here a familiar emphasis on the incomprehensibility or meaninglessness of Zoroastrian (orally transmitted) sacred tradition, with an additional motif of its impenetrable 'language' being different from that of the Persians themselves.[71] It deserves notice that in the opening chapter of the early Manichean *Kephalaia* the criticism of the unreliable scriptural basis for religious teaching is further applied to Jews and Gentiles.[72] Mani claims here that the ancient prophets of Israel, as well as later Jesus – along with Zoroaster and Buddha – all made the fatal mistake of preaching orally, trusting their disciples to put their message into writing. According to the *Kephalaia*, this caused multiple mistaken statements to find their way into the Jewish and Christian scriptures.[73]

Corroborating evidence is provided by a fifth-century Armenian author, Eznik of Kolb, who notes in his *Refutation of Sects*

Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum (Winona Lake, 2009), p. 385.

[70] It is unclear whether the Zoroastrians are perceived here as ignorant of the meaning of the words of the Avesta or of the nature of the book itself. The two interpretations, in fact, do not exclude one another (Pines, 'The Jewish Christians,' p. 277, n. 15).

[71] According to Pines ('The Jewish Christians,' p. 279), 'The reference to the incomprehensibility or meaninglessness of the language of the Avesta… probably goes back to the Sassanid period, during which Zoroastrianism was a State religion.'

[72] For an English translation, see I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher. The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary* (Leiden and New-York, 1995).

[73] See G. G. Stroumsa, 'The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity and Christian Monasticism,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.1 (2008), pp. 61–77, esp. 61–62.

that: 'Since (Zoroastrian) religion is not in writing, sometimes they say that and deceive by it, and sometimes they say this, and again mislead fools.'[74] James Russell quotes evidence that the practice of exclusively oral transmission continued even among the medieval remnants of a Zoroastrian community dwelling in Armenia.[75]

The traditions discussed in this chapter may be seen as a particular sub-group of those Persian-centered accounts – namely, the conversion/initiation stories. In our sources, as in Mani, Zoroastrians appear in the context of polemical border drawing, which focuses on issues of orality and literacy. The rest of the distinguishing identity markers usually invoked vis-à-vis the Persians – e.g., table manners or cleansing practices – are present neither in our stories nor in the Mani passage; at least, they are not explicitly employed for polemical self-identification.[76]

The minority polemical outlook reflected in both the Jewish and the Christian variations of the narrative emphasizes the reliance on the Holy Writ vis-à-vis the dominant oral culture. Each of the two traditions may very well be unaware of the other's similar reliance on Scripture. Written culture is perceived by both as the higher one, its priority highlighted by being counterpoised to the oral culture of the Persians, which is viewed with condescension if not derision. This is especially emphasized in our Christian source, as well as in Manichean polemical tracts. In the period when their civilization was still flourishing, the Iranians themselves were naturally inclined to the opposite appraisal, and the idea of the utmost necessity of the written records would appear among them only later. In this sense, the rabbinic approach holds, as it were, a middle ground, voting for a compromise. The

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[74] Eznik de Kolb, *De Deo*, Patrologia Orientalis 28, Fasc. 3, eds L. Mariés and C. Mercier (Paris, 1959); Arm. text: p. 472, par. 192.

[75] See Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, p. 297.

[76] See G. Herman, 'On Table Etiquette and Persian Culture in the Babylonian Talmud,' *Zion* 77.2 (2012), pp. 149–188. The banquet episode with Īšō'sabran's brother, cutting himself with the knife, may, however, be viewed as a residue of such secondary motifs. Cf. Vidas ('Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud,' p. 192), who highlights the practice of recitation as an identifying feature of Persian culture.

priority of 'oral texts,' as well as of the tradition's oral transmission, was already embedded in the collective memory of the rabbinic class, so one cannot expect it to be completely rejected here. In this particular context, however, it is being relegated to a secondary position, whereas pride of place is reserved for the usage and veneration of the canonical written texts.

CONVERSION AND THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

We have observed that there is at best only a somewhat loose link between the study of Scripture and conversion itself. It is noteworthy that the rabbinic conversion ceremony, as described in *b. Yeb.* 47a-b,[77] is not primarily an initiation ritual; it is concerned neither with the spiritual state of the convert nor with turning him into a member of the Jewish community. More ancient sources seem to indicate that conversion was, rather, perceived as a technical procedure making the newcomer eligible for participation in Jewish ritual practice. An illuminating example is provided by the Mishnah: 'Concerning a proselyte who converted on the day before Passover, the School of Shammai says: he immerses himself and eats the paschal lamb in the evening. The School of Hillel says: one who separated from his foreskin is (like) one who left a grave' (*m. Pes.* 8:8). The procedure of preparing for participation in the ritual thus manages to turn the newcomer into a kind of newborn Jew, but that does not presupposes any declaration of faith. Even the conversion procedure outlined later in the Talmud includes neither invoking the name of the God of Israel nor a renunciation of paganism by the convert. According to Shaye Cohen, the ceremony, apparently the product of the mid-second century C.E., was a 'vehicle by which the rabbis attempted to regulate and formalize what until then had been an entirely personal and chaotic process.'[78] Rabbis therefore felt the need, at least in some cases, to append a certain 'organizing component' that would serve as a

[77] It is somewhat curious that in the whole corpus of rabbinic literature, this seemingly important topic is discussed only once.

[78] S. J. D. Cohen, 'The Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990), pp. 203.

meaningful marker of the change in the status of the convert – i.e., becoming a lawful participant in Jewish sacral activities.

As for a reconstruction of the conversion procedure in earlier, Second Temple, times, the later tannaitic evidence highlights participation in the sacrifice as the crucial marker of the newcomer's acceptance.[79] All available rabbinic sources – both tannaitic and amoraic – agree that in the days of the Temple, converts were required to bring an offering to the altar.[80] Cohen argues convincingly that only much later, in post-talmudic times, were some well-known formal components of the initiation ritual – e.g., witness before a rabbinical court – introduced.[81] One may suppose that with only the rudimentary elements of an established halakhic conversion procedure in place, aggadic-type narratives would develop tailored to provide, as it were, a complementing symbolic replacement.[82] Our rabbinic stories introducing the motif of Torah study may thus be viewed in the context of that search for symbolic replacement. As highlighted above, in the Syriac narrative also (and even more explicitly) the study of Scripture does not constitute the conversion procedure proper but is, rather, a metaphorical confirmation of the truly new religious stance, which is now buttressed as being irreversible.

CONCLUSION

Even if the possibility of a literary interdependence of the rabbinic and Syriac traditions under discussion cannot be completely excluded, we are inclined to believe that the evidence points rather to an underlying common *topos*. This *topos* might have had its origin in a story of a wonder-child refusing to follow the ordinary course of elementary study; but in our narratives it already functions in the

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[79] See G. G. Porton, *The Stranger within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago, 1994), pp. 134–139.

[80] Ibid.

[81] As evidenced in the later post-talmudic tractate *Gerim*; see Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion,' pp. 189–191 and 203.

[82] For the foundational recognition of ritual's precedence to myth, see the seminal study of W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London, 1894).

context of religious initiation. The Persian newcomer is portrayed in both Jewish and Christian narratives as one who rejects the 'trivial' course of education based on the knowledge of written letters. In both cases, the initiation of the outsider is achieved via a private 'study session' rather than through a school-based course of education.

The narratives bear witness to the boundary-drawing strategies employed by the two minority groups to define their identity vis-à-vis a dominant culture commonly perceived as founded on orality.[83] In this context, the study of Scripture stands out as a shared marker of the minorities' self-definition. Along the similarities in portraying the Persian Other, corroborated by other available sources, meaningful nuances in appraising the emphasis on oral tradition may be discerned.[84] Whereas both Jews and Christians are inclined to present the exclusively oral Zoroastrian culture as an inferior one, the Jews are less extreme about this, allowing, even in an explicitly polemical context, for a greater measure of interconnection between the written and oral paths of learning – in accordance with their notion of the two Torahs complementing one another. This internal tension present in the Jewish version of the conversion/initiation narrative may be plausibly contextualized within broader cultural trends: a long period of oral composition and transmission of the Babylonian Talmud taking place against the background of a 'pervasive orality' characteristic of Babylonia, as contrasted with the greater prevalence of written transmission in the Greco-Roman cultural

[83] Cf. Vidas ('Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud,' p. 192), who, analyzing *b. Sotah* 22a, pointed also to a possible internal (!) direction of the polemic – namely, against those within the community (here, the Jews but in other contexts also Syrian Christians) who adopted Persian cultural patterns.

[84] For discussion of a different type of conversion stories taking place in a non-Sasanian setting, see, S. Fernandez-Ardanaz, 'La narratio nella letteratura di conversione: la struttura midrashica nel passaggio dalla historia saecularis alla historia salutis,' in *La Narrativa Cristiana Antica: codici narrativi, strutture formali, schemi retorici: XXIII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana* (Rome, 1995), pp. 249–266.

realm.[85] It is of interest that in both rabbinic and Syriac narratives the study of Scripture functions as a marker of the irreversibility of the spiritual and religious transformation. The Syriac story also emphasizes the polemical function of a Scripture-centered education, which is supposed to provide ammunition in disputations with Zoroastrians. This motif is conspicuously absent from the rabbinic narrative – a fact that may reflect the difference in modes of missionary tendencies among Jews and Christians.

A number of recent studies have highlighted the emphasis on oral tradition as an important identity marker in late antique Jewish polemic with Christianity.[86] Our investigation shows that in a dissimilar context – with Zoroastrians rather than Christians as the Other – the strategy of identity marking employed by the Jewish side was different.[87] Although not completely abandoning orality – elsewhere posited as the true mystery of God! – it stressed instead the prime importance of the ability to read the written tradition, an ability based on letter-centered literacy,[88] as the distinguishing feature vis-à-vis what was being perceived as characteristic of the Persian culture. The rabbinic conversion narratives discussed in this chapter thus highlight the relative nature of the stances taken

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[85] As suggested in Elman, 'Orality and the Redaction of Babylonian Talmud,' pp. 52–99. See also Y. Elman, 'Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages,' *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 176–180; Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia*, pp. 156–161; Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, pp. 62–63. The Jerusalem Talmud tendency of redactional thematic arrangement of material has been discussed in light of wider Roman cultural patterns in Hezser, 'The Codification of Legal Knowledge in Late Antiquity,' pp. 583–584.

[86] See, for example, Stroumsa, 'The Scriptural Movement,' pp. 61–64; Yuval, 'The Orality of Jewish Oral Law,' in Gall and Willoweit (eds), *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History*, pp. 237–260.

[87] Regarding the typology of the Other in rabbinic literature, see C. E. Hayes, 'The "Other" in Rabbinic Literature,' *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 243–269.

[88] Hirshman (*The Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture*, p. 103) remarks that such an insistence on reading is especially remarkable in light of the Talmudic culture's is self-conscious orality.

in polemical contexts – even when they pertain to such a core issue as the centrality of the Oral Torah. Whereas facing Christianity Jewish self-perception embraces the self-image of an orality-oriented tradition, in interacting with Persian culture, it focuses on the written nature of its religious heritage. The Syriac initiation narrative, presenting an unabashedly anti-oral stance, provides an instructive backdrop to the mixed strategy employed in the rabbinic variant.

APPENDIX: *MANA HI ALAF* (WHAT ALAPH IS)?

The 'conflict stories' of acquiring literacy as based on the study of the letters may have been connected to a traditional Aramaic plot of a wonder-child elementary education. The early second century *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* was mentioned in this context. Here we aim at highlighting the Aramaic-Syriac character of the narrative behind the story of Joseph's attempts at Jesus' schooling in the *Infancy Gospel*, which might have in turn stemmed from an even more ancient folklore pattern. *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (*IGT*) has reached us in a variety of versions, of which the Greek (represented by two recensions designated A and B) and the Syriac are usually seen as the main ones; they both fortunately contain a variety of stories about Jesus' education. We shall thus limit our discussion to these two versions. A number of suggestions with regard to the relation between them have been raised: Whereas Paul Peeters tried to trace them all back to an original Syriac text form,[89] other scholars did not see this proposal as tenable.[90] All, however, agree about an independent importance of the Syriac version.[91] The following analysis does not solve the general conundrum, but indicates that as far as the narrative unit in question is concerned the Syriac version might have preserved an earlier variant of the tradition.

[89] See P. Peeters, *Evangiles Apocryphes*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1914).

[90] See W. Schneelmelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville, 1991), pp. 439–441.

[91] See Schneelmelcher, ibid.

The relevant passages from the Syriac *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* are quoted in the table below.

Judged by the substantial differences in the Syriac variants of the Jesus' schooling narrative attested in paragraphs 6 (6–8), 14 and 15 respectively, they seem to reflect three independent basic traditions. In one of these traditions, Zaccheus, a pedantic teacher, insists on repeatedly reading aloud the whole alphabet from beginning to end and demands from his student to recite it after him. The offending silence of the student causes an outburst of Zaccheus's anger. He strikes the disciple 'with his hand upon his head,' but Jesus humbly and patiently teaches his teacher a lesson: One should not apply violent methods to intelligent pupils. And Zaccheus gets the lesson. In another narrative unit, another teacher who is not less pedantic applies the character-by-character method of memorizing. This time, the student is not silent but is instead actively involved, questioning already from the second letter the instructor's expertise in the subject matter. Similarly to the former pattern, the teacher strikes the student, but this time, he is immediately punished by death.

IGT Syriac 6–8	*IGT* Syriac 14	15
[T]hat he (Jesus) may learn to be fond of children of his years, and may honor old age… And Zaccheus said to Joseph: 'I will teach him (Jesus) whatever is proper for him to learn' (ܐܝܟ ܕܢܐ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܢܣܒ ܠܗ ܠܡܐ ܢܠܦ ܘܢܬܠܡܕ). And he made him go into the school (ܒܝܬ ܣܦܪܐ). And he, going in, was silent.	And Joseph, when he saw that he (Jesus) was clever (ܚܟܝܡ), wished to teach him letters (ܐܬ ܣܦܪܐ ܠܡܐ); and he brought him into the house of a scribe (ܐܬ ܒܝܬ ܣܦܪ);	But a(nother) scribe said to Joseph: 'Hand him over to me, and I will teach him.' And Jesus entered into the scribe's house (ܒܝܬ ܣܦܪ), and took a scroll (ܩܛܝܪ), and was reading not those (things) that were written, but great wonders (ܕܦܫܩ ܒܗ ܢܣ ܠܐ ܟܬܝܒ ܐܠܐ ܬܡܗ).
But Zaccheus the scribe began to tell him (the letters) from Aleph (ܫܪܝ ܠܗ ܙܟܝ ܐ ܠܐ), and was repeating to him many times the whole alphabet (ܟܠ ܐܒܓܕ ܐ ܠܗ ܘܡܬܪ ܠܗ ܫܓܝ). And he says to him that he should answer and say after him; but he was silent. Then the scribe became angry, and struck him with his hand upon his head (ܘܡܟܗ ܒܐܦ ܪܫܗ ܘܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܐ ܐܡܪ). And Jesus said: 'A smith's anvil, being beaten, can learn, and it has no feeling; but I am able to say those things, which are spoken by you, with knowledge and understanding.'	and the scribe said to him: 'Say Aleph,' (ܐܡܪ ܐ ܠܐ) and Jesus said (it) (ܐܡܪ ܐ). And the scribe next wanted him to say Beth, and Jesus said to him: 'Tell me first what Aleph is (ܐ ܡܐ ܐܡܪ ܠܐ), and then I will tell you concerning Beth. (ܒ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܐ ܡܐ ܐ)' And the scribe took and beat him (ܘܡܟܗ);	
The scribe answered and said: 'This (child) is something great…'	and immediately he (the scribe) fell down and died; and Jesus went to his family.	

We are thus dealing here with two variants of Jesus the wonder-child story in which a pedantic teacher – applying different pedagogical methods – either mends his ways or dies. The appearance of this doublet seems to be justified from the compiler's point of view by differing contexts within the overall narrative of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, in which its two parts are incorporated. A certain artificiality of the incorporating effort itself indicates its urgency: Whereas in the first case, the need to teach Jesus letters is coupled with the need to teach him proper behavior in the wake of his violence toward his peers (and Joseph's violence towards Jesus, *IGT* 3–5), the second attempt to teach him the alphabet is explained as provoked by Jesus' miraculous contribution to his father's carpenter trade (*IGT* 13). The somewhat uneven integration of these traditions into the Syriac version may point to a relatively early phase of formation of its literary form from basic oral elements. One may further note that the phrase '(Tell me first) what Alaph is' seems to have reflected an existing convention between the narrator and his audience and thus was in no need of elaboration despite its somewhat elliptic character. Whatever the intention of the question, the narrative unit in par. 14 shows no sign of ascribing the letters a symbolical or any other sublime meaning.

The third story in par. 15 is invoked in *IGT* to explain Jesus' refusal to learn the letters in the preceding episode. In our view, however, it seems to have originally represented one more independent narrative tradition where the crux of the conflict is closer to the one underlying the *Vita* of Īšōʿsabran – namely, the tension between the text-oriented and oral knowledge. Here, Jesus refuses to follow what seems to be another traditional method of education with the teacher reading verse-by-verse from the Scripture while the student is supposed to reiterate after him. Instead, the wonder-child suggests a quasi-prophetic interpretation of the Scripture, unearthing its wondrous hidden meanings. It deserves notice that all these alternative methods of education – memorization of the letters one-by-one, memorization of the alphabet

as a whole and verse-by-verse memorization – are referred to in rabbinic sources.[92]

As noted, the Greek version is represented by two recensions, with the table below reflecting the fuller recension A, which contains all three narrative units attested in the Syriac (meaningful variants in recension B will be relegated to footnotes).[93]

Already in the Greek version of the first narrative one finds what seems to be further elaboration and embellishment reflecting a Greek-speaking philosophically inclined milieu. Jesus is described as a smart youth who 'has a mind.' A simple repetition of the alphabet is 'appended' with 'much discussion' and the whole process is presented as aiming at acquiring the 'understanding of the letters.' Unlike the Syriac version, the instructor here comes out as much more sophisticated. The Greek author further embellishes the basic story by replacing the parable of the smith's anvil with the motif of the 'philosophical' knowledge of the letters according to their 'nature' with Jesus delivering a full-fledged lecture on the topic.

The Greek version in par. 14 also presents itself as more developed than its Syriac parallel – with a telling and clearly secondary clarification of the curriculum that includes both Greek and Hebrew.[94] Here also, Jesus demands from the instructor to tell him about the 'essence' of the letters defined this time as their 'power.' It is of interest that the Greek editor overlooks the difference between the two methods of schooling apparent in the Syriac narrative – another possible indication of its secondary character. Secondary embellishments in a similar vein can be easily discerned in the quoted passage from par. 15. It should be also noted that unlike the Syriac story with its meaningful difference between the first and the second teachers – with the former portrayed as one who grasps the lesson – the Greek version has already moved forward to create a stereotyped portrait of all Jesus' instructors.

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[92] See *Avot de R. Natan* A 6 p. 29 and 8 p. 37 and compare *Deut. Rabba* 8, ed. S. Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 115, *b. Gittin* 70a. See also C. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 75–79.

[93] See Schneelmelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, p. 440.

[94] Cf. 'litteras gentilicias' of the Latin version here (see C. de. Tischendorf [ed.], *Evangelia Apocrypha* [Leipzig, 1876], p. 176).

IGT Greek 6	*IGT* Greek 14–15	*IGT* Greek 15
A man named Zaccheus, a teacher, was standing there and he heard, in part, Jesus saying these things to his father. He was greatly astonished that he said such things, since he was just a child. 2 And after a few days he approached Joseph and said to him: 'You have a smart child (παιδίον φρόνιμον ἔχεις), and he has a mind (νοῦν ἔχει). Come, hand him over to me so that he may learn writing (γράμματα). I will give him all understanding with the letters (μετὰ τῶν γραμμάτων πᾶσαν ἐπιστήμην), and teach him to greet all the elders and to honor them as grandfathers and fathers and to love his peers.'	14 When Joseph saw the mind (τὸν νοῦν) and age of the child, that he was growing up, he again wished him not to be ignorant of letters (ἄπειρον τῶν γραμμάτων). And he took him and gave him to another teacher (ἑτέρῳ διδασκάλῳ).	After some time there was another teacher, a good friend of Joseph. He said to him: 'Bring the child to me at school (εἰς τὸ παιδευτήριον), maybe by flattery (μετὰ κολακείας) I can teach him letters.' Joseph said: 'If you dare, brother, take him with you.' He took him with fear and much anxiety, but the child went with pleasure.
3 He told him all the letters from the Alpha to the Omega plainly, with much discussion (μετὰ πολλῆς ἐξετάσεως). But Jesus looked at Zaccheus	But the teacher said to Joseph: 'First I will teach him Greek, and then Hebrew (τὰ ἑλληνικά ἔπειτα τὰ ἑβραΐκα).'[95] For the	Jesus went boldly into the school and found a book (βιβλίον) lying on the lectern, and taking it, did not

[95] Cf. recension B 7, where the language of learning is still defined as Hebrew, whereas the names of the letters clearly indicate Greek: Τράψας

the teacher, and said to him: 'You do not know the Alpha according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν), how do you teach others Beta? You hypocrite! First, if you know it, teach the Alpha, then we shall believe you about Beta.' Then he began to question the teacher about the first letter and he could not answer him.	teacher knew the child's learning and feared him. Nevertheless he wrote the alphabet and taught him for many hours, but Jesus did not answer him.	read the letters (τὰ γράμματα) in it, but opened his mouth and spoke by the Holy Spirit and taught the Law (πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ ἐδίδασκε τὸν νόμον) to those standing nearby.
4 Many heard as the child said to Zaccheus: 'Listen, teacher, to the order of the first element (τὴν τοῦ πρώτου στοιχείου τάξιν), and pay attention to this, how it has lines, and a central mark, which goes through the two lines you see, (they) converge, go up, again come to head, become the same three times, subordinate, and hypostatic, isometric…(thus) you know the lines of Alpha.'	2 Then Jesus said to him: 'If you really are a teacher, and you know the letters well, tell me the power of Alpha (τοῦ ἄλφα τὴν δύναμιν) and I will tell you that of Beta.' The teacher was angered and hit Jesus on the head. The child was hurt and cursed him. Immediately the teacher fainted, falling upon his face. 3 The child returned to the house of Joseph.	A great crowd gathered and stood listening to him. They were astonished at the beauty of his teaching and the eloquence of his words, that being a babe he could say such things.

δὲ ὁ Ζακχαῖος τὴν ἀλφάβητον ἑβραιστί καὶ λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν Ἄλφα βῆτα.'

We have thus observed a number of basic alternative patterns related to the initial schooling of Jesus found in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Their earlier forms attested in the Syriac version seem to have been further developed in the Greek recensions. One may reasonably suppose that *IGT* builds upon an earlier stratum of oral Jesus the wonder-child stories. An indication, albeit indirect, for an ancient folk character of at least some elements of those stories may be detected in a fable in the Syriac version of *The Wisdom of Ahiqar*,[96] where it is not a young boy but a wolf who is brought to school to be taught the alphabet (8.36): 'They brought him [the wolf] to the teacher's house (ܐܝܬܘ ܠܗ ܠܒܝܬ ܡܠܦܢܐ); and the master (ܡܠܦܢܐ) said to him "Alaph, Bet (ܐ ܒ)." [But] the wolf said: "Kid, Lamb (ܓܕܝ ܐܡܪܐ)."'[97]

It is difficult to decide which pattern of the study – letter-by-letter or the recitation of the whole alphabet from beginning to end – is meant in this tradition by ܐ ܒ. Be that as it may, the wolf is characteristically reluctant to learn the letters, preferring to focus on the (hidden) content which reflects his real interest. The wolf here recognizes the potential of learning the alphabet as instrumental for constructing words to designate his extra-literary goals – namely, the preferred entries on his meat diet.[98]

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[96] In recent decades, there is a growing tendency to view Aramaic as the original language of the Ahiqar story. See J. M. Lindenberger, 'Ahiqar (Seventh to Sixth Century B.C.): A New Translation and Introduction,' in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York, 1985), p. 481. The wolf-episode, however, is absent from the surviving fragments of the Aramaic text from Elephantine.

[97] According to British Museum Add. 7200=S1. See F. C. Conybeare, R. Harris and A. S. Lewis (eds), *The Story of Ahikar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions* (Cambridge, 1913), p. 127.

[98] See A. Demsky,'School Texts,' in W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (eds), *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1 (Leiden and New York, 1997), p. 365. In light of surviving Armenian and Arabic versions (see Conybeare et al., *The Story of Ahikar*, p. lxxxvi), the original Syriac tradition of the wolf's response might have referred to the three – not two

One may thus tentatively suggest the following genesis of the literary motif in question. In the beginning of the process, certain realities of the traditional schooling patterns, centered on the learning of the alphabet, might have been employed for creating didactic fables of the kind found in the *Wisdom of Ahiqar* and describing an attempt to educate a hapless 'first-grader.' The further developments would include two distinctive patterns. On the one hand, the letter-centered-education motif was transformed into a litmus test for revealing the protagonist's sublime knowledge and true powers and in this form integrated into the *mirabilia* story about the education of a child of divine origin.[99] On the other, it was adjusted by the narrators of the conversion stories, the Syriac Christian and the rabbinic Jewish one, to the education of adult outsiders. The relationship between these two offshoots warrants further investigation.

– first letters of the alphabet, *Alaph*, *Beth* and *Gamal*: ܐܒܓ ܐܠܦ ܒܝܬ ܓܡܠ (lamb and goat in my belly).

[99] For the mythological background of the Jesus infancy stories and comparison to other idealized presentations of children in antiquity, see, for example, D. E. Aune, 'Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity,' in D. L. Baich, E. Ferguson and W. A. Meeks (eds), *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Minneapolis, 1990), pp. 3–19; Z. P. Thundy, 'Intertextuality, Buddhism and the Infancy Gospels,' In J. Neusner et al. (eds), *Religious Writings and Religious Systems*, vol. 1 (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 17–73.

CHAPTER SIX:
BROADER CULTURAL PATTERNS IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE

The previous chapter addressed the question of parallel responses to the general cultural situation of Persian hegemony by Jews and Syriac Christians, two religious minority groups in the Sasanian Empire – a similarity that makes the comparative analysis of their identity-shaping strategies of particular interest.[1] We will discuss here some additional test cases illustrating strategies and literary patterns characteristic of patristic and rabbinic discourse – a discussion that will highlight the reciprocal relationship between Syriac and Jewish studies. In this chapter, we will also further chart a particular avenue of investigation – namely, arguing that such a comparative analysis can lead to the unearthing of literary *topoi* of broader circulation – neither particularly Jewish nor Christian – adapted by both regional Christian and Jewish traditions. We focus on two examples of the comparative reading of rabbinic and Syriac Christian narratives, which on the Christian side come from the *Life of Īšoʿsabran*, by the Catholicos *Īšōʿyahb* III in the early seventh century (620 CE), discussed earlier, and from the supposedly sixth-century *Vita of Barsauma*.

[1] See R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, 'Zoroastrian Proselytes in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives: Orality-Related Markers of Cultural Identity,' *History of Religions* 51.3 (2012), pp. 197–218.

TRAVEL HAZARDS AS FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE: COMMON SOURCES OF RABBINIC AND SYRIAC NARRATIVES

In the previous chapter, the discussion centered on Īšōʿsabran's acquiring – through intensive schooling in his hometown – 'an invincible armor of the Holy Scriptures' spiritual iron' that would enable him to prevail in the *agon* of martyrdom.[2] Here, however, we are dealing with the protagonist's departure from his native city – on the way to solitary retreat in the wilderness:

> One day, when I was staying under that rock, I overheard something that sounded like a conversation among many men who were saying to one another: Let us make this rock fall on him and destroy him (ܢܥܒܝ ܠܗ ܘܢܒܕܘܗܝ ܠܗ ܟܐܦܐ). And they cried all together with a strong voice like manual workers do: Now, all of you together (ܗܐ ܟܠܗ ܗܐ)![3] And lo, a crack of the rock breaking down was heard and it was slightly displaced (ܗܘܬ ܡܬܒܪܝ ܩܠܐ) and was already falling upon me (ܢܦܠܬ ܥܠܝ ܟܟܐ). But in the end all their scheme [thanks to God's grace] came to nothing.[4]

The episode is flanked by descriptions of a series of demonic appearances harassing Īšōʿsabran during his sojourn in the wilderness; the context thus indicates that what our protagonist overhears in his half-sleep while resting in the shade of the menacing rock is a conversation of conspiring demons. One of them casually suggests pushing the rock onto the head of Īšōʿsabran; the rock starts moving, but in the final account the plot to hurt the holy man, who is destined for a great future, amounts to nothing.[5]

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[2] Īšōʿyahb of Adiabene, *The Story of Jesus-Sabran*, Fol. 195b, ed. M. J.-B. Chabot, p. 524.

[3] One notes the use of what seems to be an idiomatic expression borrowed from an oral Aramaic-speaking culture (*ha shwat ha*), to which our pedestrian translation hardly does justice.

[4] *Story of Jesus-Sabran*, Fol. 197a-b, ed. Chabot, pp. 528–529.

[5] No concrete explanation is provided, however, except for the general reference to God's grace.

In tractate *Ta'anit* 21a of the Babylonian Talmud, the relatively late Babylonian narrator puts two pious rabbinic travelers of the 3rd century in a similar situation of a close escape from imminent danger:[6]

> Ilfa and R. Yohanan were in extreme need. They said: 'Let us rise, go and busy ourselves with commerce (נעביד עסקא) and let us fulfill in ourselves (the verse): "There shall be no needy among you" (Deut 15: 4).' They went and sat down under the ruins of a certain unstable wall (גודא רעיעא). While they were eating bread, R. Yohanan overheard one angel saying to another: 'Come, let us cast it down upon them and kill them, for they are abandoning eternal life and busying themselves with temporal life.' The other said to him: 'Let them be! One of them has a great future before him.'

The story goes on with what, in fact, may be an independent narrative unit:

> R. Yohanan said to Ilfa: 'Did the master hear anything?' He said to him: 'No.' He said [to himself]: 'This means that I am the one with a great future, I will return and fulfil on myself the verse, "For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land" (Deut. 15:11).' By the time Ilfa came back, R. Yohanan was leading the Academy. When Ilfa came, they said to him: 'Had you sat and studied, would you not be leading?'
>
> Ilfa went and suspended himself on the boom of a ship. He said: 'If anyone asks me a question regarding the *baraita* of the school of R. Hiyya and the school of R. Oshaya and I do not explain it to him on the basis of our

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[6] For various analyses of this story, see Y. Fraenkel, *Studies in the Spiritual World of the Aggadic Narrative* (Tel Aviv, 1981), pp. 89–91; D. Levine, 'Holy Men and Rabbis in Talmudic Antiquity,' in M. Poorthius and J. Schwartz (eds), *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 45–57; C. Licht, *Ten Legends of the Sages: The Image of the Sage in Rabbinic Literature* (Hoboken, 1991), pp. 181–206.

> Mishna, I will throw myself from the boom of the ship and drown in the river.'[7]

The famous R. Yohanan b. Napaha and his friend Ilfa – both, like Īšōʿsabran, at the very beginning of their religious vocation but on the verge of preferring a business career – are described as having an afternoon nap in the shade of ruins. One of them overhears the conversation of two mysterious creatures,[8] one of whom suggests killing both would-be rabbis by pushing onto them the shaky wall of the ruins. His interlocutor, however, cautions against the plot, supporting his reservations by the knowledge that one of the two Torah students is destined for great fame.

In addition to the obvious overlap, our stories also contain meaningful differences. Thus unlike Īšōʿsabran, conspired against by evil demons on his way to the glorious *agon* of religious perfection, the rabbinic protagonists are trying to escape their scholarly destiny and consequently face the intervention of angels. Instead of the rock of Īšōʿsabran's story, the rabbinic narrative features an unstable wall – a typical element of Babylonian story-telling and an outstanding marker of a halakhic issue pertaining to city dwellers.[9] Literary dependence between the rabbinic and Syriac

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[7] The English translation is based upon J. L. Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore, 2010), pp. 41–42, relying mainly on MS Oxford 366.

[8] Some versions specify that these are God's 'servant angels' (מלאכי השרת).

[9] See Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, pp. 44 and 54. The wall hazard and the miraculous intervention of the angel appear also in a parallel from a Christian travel story attributed to John Moschos (late 6th – early 7th century). See John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Introduction, English translation and notes by J. Wortley (Kalamazoo, 1992), p. 220. We are grateful to our friend Hillel Newman for this reference. For the motif of a holy man's ability to prevent destruction of the building, see, for example, *b. Taanit* 21a and *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 3, 2. See D. Stein, 'Collapsing Structures: Discourse and the Destruction of the Temple in the Babylonian Talmud,' *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98 (2008), pp. 1–2; R. Kiperwasser, 'The Visit of the Rural Sage: Text, Context and Intertext in a Rabbinic Narrative,' *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 26 (2009), pp. 3–24.

traditions under discussion seems unlikely; one should reasonably see them as developing the source-narrative independently, expressing their different cultural identities. Thus whereas journeying is an important factor in shaping the identity of a Christian ascetic, in rabbinic narrative it is perceived as a distraction from the ideal of incessant Torah study in the frame of a *beth-midrash* (house of study). As no explicit polemical markers can be discerned here, we are inclined to presume that the evidence points rather to the two versions' dependence on an underlying common *topos*.

If we look for an earlier version of the story in the Palestinian Talmud, we will find a prototype of its second part only in the form of a doublet attested in two Talmudic tractates:

y. Ketubbot 6:7 [31a]	*y. Qiddushin* 1:1 [58 d]
R. Yose said: 'That section resolved Hilfa's question.' He (Hilfa) said: 'Place me on the bank of the river. If I cannot derive the *baraitot* of R. Hiyya the Great from our Mishnah, throw me into the river!' What did he (R. Hiyya) say? 'Let the trustee do that with which he was charged' (*m. Ket.* 6:7).	Hilfai said: 'Place me on the bank of a river. If I cannot derive the *baraita* of R. Hiyya the Great from our Mishna, throw me into the river.' They said to him: 'Behold, R. Hiyya taught: "A *sela* is four dinars".' He said to them: 'So too we have learnt in the Mishna […]' (*m. Baba Metzia* 4:5). They said to him: 'Behold, R. Hiyya taught […]' He said to them: 'So too we have learnt in the Mishna.'

This Palestinian prototype of the story from the Babylonian Talmud is very short and puzzling, but it was probably important enough for the editors of the Palestinian Talmud to record it twice as an exemplary case of a challenge to a scholar. Hilfai offers to demonstrate his proficiency in the Oral Torah by equating laws found in the *baraitot* (tannaitic traditions external to the Mishnah) of R. Hiyya's collection with equivalent teachings in the Mishna itself. So confident is he of his knowledge that he agrees to be

thrown into the river if he fails the challenge. He successfully answers five queries pertaining to monetary issues, achieving exactly what he had promised – a correspondence between a particular Mishna unit and the parallel *baraita*. This story was transmitted to Babylonia, where the editors of tractate *Taʿanit* borrowed its second part,[10] appending it to a newly composed narrative about travel hazards.

Remaining faithful to the nature of the scholarly challenge to Hilfai (here named Ilfa), the Babylonian editors reworked the story to accord with their life context. In the original version, the hero offers to be thrown into the river – not to jump from a ship's boom. Taking into account the nature of rivers in Palestine, it is doubtful whether the Palestinian narrator meant to put his protagonist in mortal danger; he probably only wanted to express the humiliation the hero would undergo if tossed into the water as a consequence of his failure to stand up to the challenge. In the Babylonian Talmud's context the river is viewed as deep and wide, with sailing ships; correspondingly the protagonist offers in case of failure to jump into the river and drown. This change could be explained by the general tendency of the Babylonian narrator to embellish the narrative with additional drama, and by his understanding of the phonetically changed name of the protagonist as a pun – 'Ilfa' meaning boat in Babylonian Aramaic.[11]

What appears in the passage from *b. Taʿanit* 21a discussed above is, in fact, a later and significantly transformed version of the story, where Ilfa's halakhic challenge becomes secondary to an earlier miraculous travel hazard episode. It seems that the Babylonian Jewish storytellers constructed their version of the narrative by creating and adding to the story of the halakhic challenge – reaching them from Palestinian predecessors – the account of R. Yohanan and Ilfa leaving the Academy. By so doing,

[10] See Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, pp. 48–53. Cf. inter alia *b. Ket.* 69b, where it appears in an almost intact form.

[11] See M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmud and Geonic Periods* (Ramat Gan, 2002), p. 116.

they filled in the narrative gap by explaining why Ilfa took the challenge upon himself.[12]

What provoked Ilfa's bizarre act? That he simply wished to show off his intellectual prowess is apparently not a satisfactory explanation, especially after the transformation of the consequences of failure, from being thrown into the river to jumping from a boom and drowning. The storytellers provide a narrative motivation for Ilfa's action, constructing a plot from elements that seem to have been of major importance in their Babylonian Jewish culture. Such typical elements of Babylonian Talmudic storytelling have recently been singled out from our narrative by Jeffry Rubenstein: a) the action taken in extreme need; b) a typical divine punishment by means of an unstable wall; c) a propitious foretelling that changes the course of the hero's life; and d) a collision between eternal life as the reward for Torah study and the temporal life of business.[13] We suggest that the existence of an independent Syriac Christian parallel enables one to complement Rubenstein's analysis, associating the above list of individual motifs with a developed narrative *topos* of broader circulation – namely, originally belonging to neither a specifically Jewish nor a Christian minority milieu.

In the hypothetical legendary narrative containing that *topos*, the protagonist might have been presented at the very beginning of his testing life-journey as being exposed for a fleeting moment to the intervention of angelic/demonic powers and a hint of his future triumph – with a menacing wall as a characteristic marker. In our view, then, this case both demonstrates how the shared motifs are modified in different ways in our two religiously motivated narratives and exemplifies the relevance of a comparative analysis of Syriac Christian and Babylonian rabbinic sources for unearthing elements of their broader common late antique cultural backdrop.

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[12] See Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, pp. 48–53.

[13] Ibid., p. 53.

BARSAUMA IN THE MIDST OF A SEA TEMPEST: EXPLORING THE SOURCES OF A NARRATIVE BRICOLAGE

In the previous test case, we highlighted the reciprocal potential of a comparative study of Syriac Christian and Babylonian rabbinic sources with parallel traditions even where these traditions do not show signs of direct dependence or contact. We have suggested that in some such cases the comparative analysis of the sources representing two minority groups – vis-à-vis the dominant Iranian culture – both highlighted their different religious agendas and allowed for restoring otherwise unattested patterns of their broader cultural backdrop.[14] The present case continues this line of investigation, with the focus now being on the sea-voyage story in the *Vita of Barsauma* – probably a sixth-century composition – discussed in further detail in the following chapter.[15] A close reading of this tempest episode leads us to argue that the narrator is prone to indiscriminately use both motifs from his particular Christian outlook and from broader regional traditions. A rabbinic parallel will be instructive in demonstrating a similar readiness to adopt common, religiously neutral, narrative patterns from the general cultural legacy.

In late antique shipwreck stories, when a storm broke out and the sailor's skills proved inadequate, he would turn for help to the ship's god, for the storm was deemed a sign of the god's displeasure. The adventures of Jonah are a well-known earlier example of this phenomenon, often repeated in hagiographic literature.[16] Some elements of this typical narration could have been borrowed by Christian and rabbinic sources. The story from the

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[14] A. H. Becker, 'Polishing the Mirror: Some Thoughts on Syriac Sources and Early Judaism,' in R. S. Boustan, K. Herrmann, R. Leicht, A. Yoshiko Reed, and G. Veltri (eds), *Envisioning Judaism. Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer*, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 2013), pp. 897–916, esp. pp. 897–899.

[15] See R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, 'The Holy Land and Its Inhabitants in the Pilgrimage Narrative of the Persian Monk Bar Sauma,' *Cathedra* 148 (2013), pp. 41–70.

[16] J. Rouge, *Ships and Fleets of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Middletown, CT, 1981), pp. 198–199 n. 4.

Vita, however, is somewhat unusual and does not fully correspond to Jonah's prototype.

Our protagonist's dramatic sea journey takes him from Laodicea on the northern Syrian Coast to the shores of the Promised Land. Generally speaking, the motif of a sea journey and, more pointedly of a tempest hazard is well attested in late antique sources, including Christian and rabbinic ones.[17] Its importance stands out in our *Vita*, which includes two such episodes, where the storm is miraculously subdued. In a later instance (Sign 53), it is the presence of Barsauma, the ascetic wearing an iron *chiton* under his cloak (ܟܬܢܐ ܕܦܪܙܠܐ ܘܟܝܣ ܕܣܡܝܢ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܟܬܢ), to whom the authority is given over the land and sea and everything (ܒܝܡ ܘܒܝܒܫܐ ܘܒܟܠ ܡܕܡ...ܗܘ ܫܠܝܛ) who saves the travelers from shipwreck.[18] In contrast, in the preceding narrative unit of the *Vita* (Sign 52),[19] Barsauma, albeit present, remains for the most part a silent observer of the miraculous forces intervening on his and his disciples' behalf.

A salient feature of the narrative here is its composite character with a number of seemingly independent sea-voyage redemption motifs collated together. The first of these motifs highlights Barsauma's presence as the true merit and reason for redemptive miraculous action: Thanks to him standing in the middle of the ship, the gigantic waves though overarching the vessel did not flood it (ܗܘ ܕܒܡܨܥ ܐܝܟ ܠܐ ܫܠܛ ܒܝܡ ܘܠܐ ܥܒܪ ܠܐ ܥܒܪ).[20]

The narrative presents this miraculous protection as clearly insufficient, as Barsauma's companions remain frightened and continue to weep, which justifies introducing the next sub-unit.

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[17] Regarding Jewish material, see, for example, C. Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2011), pp. 161–196. For Byzantine accounts, see Rouge, *Ships and Fleet*, pp. 15–17.

[18] See the forthcoming preliminary edition, A. Palmer, *Life of Barsauma* (=*Vita*) 79. We are thankful to Andrew Palmer who has generously provided to us the text.

[19] *Vita* 78.

[20] *Vita* 78.2. Cf. Exod 14:22, 29. See also the development of the motif of protecting walls of water in *Midrash Psalms* 114.7 (ed. S. Buber, Vilna, 1891).

One of the disciples looked up to heaven and saw the image of a lady clad in purple (ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܕܡܬܠܒܫܐ ܒܐܪܓܘܢܐ ܘܒܝܕܗ ܐܚܪܬܐ) – clearly a sign of her royal standing. The lady of the vision, described as capable of descending through the air (ܕܡܬܚܙܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܠܬܚܬ ܒܐܘܝܪܐ), approaches the ship and exhorts the travelers to 'give glory to God' so that they will 'come out of the sea safely (ܕܢܦܩܘܢ ܒܫܠܡܐ ܡܢ ܝܡܐ).' The encouragement to prayer contains a clear allusion to Deut 32:3, with its implicit link to the threatening forces of nature.[21] Noting the lack of any explicitly Christian motifs, as well as the complete absence of references to the Virgin Mary throughout the rest of the *Vita*, we are inclined to see here the reflection of a motif from a common cultural background, mobilized by our Christian author. Even if one cannot surely identify the provenance of 'flying lady' motif, one may note that in Roman and Greek sources Isis, that 'Mistress of the Sea,' is described as the patroness of seafarers who saves them in their hour of distress.[22] In Hellenistic and Roman cultures, there were two seafaring deities par excellence: Isis and Serapes. The Greek version of Isis became the goddess of the sea, and festivals in her name marked the beginning of the sailing season.[23]

The stereotypical opening 'Another disciple likewise raised eyes to heaven and saw' introduces the next take on miraculous redemptive intervention – he saw 'a tent-peg fixed in the sky and three cords of flax thrown down onto the ship; and the cords were secured to that peg entrenched in the sky.'[24] Further on, the same disciple sees two angels 'striding ahead of the ship' walking on the sea and pulling the ship along with white ropes. Without spelling it out, the narrative seems to indicate that the angels descended from heaven along those flax cords.[25]

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[21] Deut 32:3: 'For I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Ascribe greatness to our God!'

[22] See F. Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 50 and 56.

[23] See Rouge 197–198.

[24] *Vita* 78.5.

[25] It deserves notice that according to an ancient widespread cosmological notion, earth and sky merge at the distant horizons of the

The angels also pushed away the gigantic waves with the red staffs held in their hands. This latter sub-motif of subduing the waves with miraculously empowered sticks is likewise attested in a Babylonian rabbinic narrative from *b. B. Bathra* 73a, where the feat is described as routinely performed by the (Jewish?) sailors themselves rather than by heavenly creatures:

> Raba b. Barhana said: Seafarers told me: the top of the wave coming to sink the ship is shaped as the fringe of a pale fire. We strike it with tree-branches engraved with 'I am who I am, the *Yah* Lord of Hosts, Amen, Amen, Selah.'[26]

This paraphrase of Exod 3:14 seems to be used here as a magic formula establishing the dominion of the God of Israel over the powers of nature. One may suggest that the fiery light of the threatening wave is to be overwhelmed by the light of God's countenance, which equals the light of the Torah.

A literary pattern from ancient Persian culture, used by Herodotus, indicates that the rabbinic story might have 'Judaized' a motif of wider circulation (Herodotus, *Histori*es 7, tr. G. C. Macaulay):

> …When Xerxes heard it he was exceedingly enraged, and bade them scourge the Hellenspont with three hundred strokes of the lash and let down into the sea a pair of fetters. Nay, I have heard further that he sent branders also with them to brand the Hellespont. However this may be, he enjoined them, as they were beating, to say Barbarian and presumptuous words as follows: 'You bitter water, your master lays upon you this penalty, because you did wrong him not having suffered any wrong from him; and Xerxes the king will pass over you

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ocean, whereas in the region of Barsauma's travel the distance between them remains great. See A. J. Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites* (Amsterdam, 1918); G. Ben-Ami Zarfati, 'Talmudic Cosmography,' *Tarbiz* 35 (1966), pp. 137–148.

[26] A paraphrase of Exod 3:14 seems to be used here as a magic formula establishing the dominion of the God of Israel over the powers of nature.

> whether you be willing or no, but with right, as it seems, no man does sacrifice to you, seeing that you are a treacherous and briny stream.' The sea he enjoined them to chastise thus, and also he bade them to cut off the heads of those who were appointed to have charge over the bridging of the Hellespont.

It may be supposed that the additional motif of engraving God's name in the Babylonian Talmud is designed to provide for 'Judaization' of the common narrative pattern, whereas in our Christian story the appearance of angels serves the parallel task of Christianization. It is not possible to establish with certainty the meaning of the 'red sticks' (ﻩﺪﻫﺪﻫﺍ ﻭﻫﺪﻫﺍ) and whether they reflect a link to the branches mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud and/or in Herodotus' story. It may, however, be tentatively suggested that they are all related to the Persian cultic procedure of punishing the 'bad water' – the rebellious part of nature that wickedly participated with Ahariman in the battle against the believers of the true religion. According to Zoroastrian doctrine, salt water was formerly sweet water contaminated by the assault of the hostile spirit. [27] Be that as it may, as in earlier phases of the tempest episode, here also the narrator emphasizes the incomplete character of the victory over the storm. This in turn allows the transition to yet another stage of the tale: 'From that moment onwards not one of the sea's waves reared up to cover the ship and yet it was blowing raging gale (ﻩﻮﻫ ﻥﺎﺤﺟ ﺡﻮﺼﻟ ﻊﻘﻴﻟﺍ ﻲﺑ ﺎﻬﻨﻣ).'[28]

It is at this moment that the intervention of Barsauma is introduced, ostensibly to complete the calming of the storm: 'When the morning light began to dawn, the blessed Barsauma said his prayers… and all of sudden with the first note that emerged from the athlete [of faith'] (ﺎﻨﻴﺳﺮﺑ) mouth the wind dropped (ﺢﻴﺿ ﺎﻫﺪﻫﺪﻫ ﻩﺎﻨﻫ) and the din of the ocean-storm fell silent (ﻩﺪﻫ ﻭﻫﺘﻌﻟﺍ ﻲﻌﻟ ﻼﻟﺍ).'[29] However, even this did not bring our narrative to closure as it turned out that the skippers of the ship interpreted

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[27] On the passage from Herodotus, quoted above, see M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 2 (Leiden and Köln, 1982), pp. 165–167.

[28] *Vita* 78.5.

[29] *Vita* 78.6.

– and, it seems, not without reason – the sudden stillness as announcing the greatest danger: '[they] thought they were on their way down the drain of the great sea *Okeanos* (ܘܚܫܒܘ ܕܗܘ ܒܝܡܐ ܪܒܐ ܕܐܘܩܝܢܘܣ ܕܐܙܠܝܢ ܠܗ ܘܐܡܪܝܢ ܠܐ ܢܗܦܟ ܠܐܬܪܐ ܕܝܬܒ). Thus they said, "we can never return to an inhabited place (ܘܠܐ ܢܥܠ ܠܐܬܪ ܝܬܒ), because we have fallen right into the drain of the outermost *Okeanos* (ܗܐ ܕܢܦܠܢ ܒܡܥܪܒܬܐ ܕܐܘܩܝܢܘܣ ܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܠ)".'[30]

It seems that the skippers here rely on a common seafarers' presupposition, according to which somewhere in the middle of the great ocean there is a spot where the waters stand still. If a ship arrives there by misfortune, it can only escape through a miraculous intervention. The hydrological function of this spot is to annul the excessive gradient of the water otherwise threatening to flood the earth. Evidence for such a perception may be gleaned from Greek, Roman and rabbinic sources; a couple of examples will suffice here.

The fifth-century Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* (13.6) relates a story about two rabbis traveling on the high seas (מפרישים בים הגדול) and arriving at a place where the water stood still (למים שאינם מהלכים). There is no indication how they managed to escape from there, but it is told that afterwards they arrived in Rome with a sample jar of water taken from that place and performed there for the Roman Emperor a demonstration of the water's wondrous ability to swallow other water.

The narrative purpose of the rescue of the rabbis and the demonstration is to teach the hostile Roman the superiority of Jewish scholars. Benjamin Z. Bacher has discussed the cosmological theories reflected in this text, ascribing the still water motif to the Greek legend of Charybdis.[31] Judah Theodor, the co-editor of the text, further indicated the Greek quasi-scientific concept that salty waters swallow up fresh waters.[32] Daniel Sperber, however, disputes the association of the still water motif with Charybdis, arguing that there the water did not stand still (Odyssey 12). He therefore suggests that at most what we have here is a

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[30] *Vita* 78.7.

[31] *Aggadot ha-tannaim* (ed. B. Z. Bacher, Vienna, 1920), pp. 95–97.

[32] For a similar discussion, see R. Pattai, *Ancient Jewish Seafaring* (Jerusalem, 1938), p. 215 n. 9.

considerable modification of a Greek motif.[33] We thus tentatively propose that our Jewish and Syriac authors share here a mythological geography concerning a certain dead spot in the ocean, a black hole of sorts, from which boats can escape only by a miracle. The notion of such a point in the distant sea where no ship can pass may be discerned in the story of the wandering of Sataspes in Herodotus.[34]

In the much later midrashic anthology *Kohelet Rabbah* (11.1),[35] an extended and modified version of the tale is attested, providing missing details of the seafarers' rescue and attempting a rational interpretation of the miraculous event. According to *Kohelet Rabbah*, the seafarers, having found themselves in that dead spot in the deep, and realizing the helplessness of their situation, righteously decided to share their food supplies. Their pious concern for one another was duly rewarded: A sea monster, attracted by the scent of the grilled goat-meat hanging from the deck, grabbed it and started pulling the ship out of the dead still zone – not unlike the angels in Barsauma's tale.

It is noteworthy that all these stories share a common knowledge of the ocean's 'dead spot.' Though one may discern in the motif of pious sharing an import from Jewish tradition and thus 'Judaization' of sorts of a common pattern of seafarers' stories, it is less explicit than the engraving of God's name in the magic-flavored story from the Babylonian Talmud, addressed above.

In our narrative, redemption from the ocean's dead spot comes through a mysterious winged creature wearing a cornelian red crown, whom Barsauma's disciples witness descending and circling the ship. Finally, the winged creature turned around and

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[33] See D. Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica* (Ramat Gan, 1987), p. 98.

[34] See L. Casson, *The Ancient Mariners* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 119–120.

[35] See, for example, L. Grünhut, *Kritische Untersuchung des Midrasch Kohelet Rabbah* (Berlin, 1892); J. Wachten, *Midrasch-Analyse: Strukturen in Midrasch Qohelet Rabba* (Hildesheim, 1978); Hirshman, *Midrash Qohelet Rabbah: Chapters 1–4*; Kiperwasser, *Midrashim on Kohelet: Studies in their Redaction and Formation*, pp. 43–72.

the ship immediately 'changed its course and turned to follow the bird toward its destination.'[36] The salvific function of a bird appearing at the time when a ship is threatened by a mighty storm is attested, for instance, in *b. Baba Bathra* 74b in a story related by r. Yehudah Hindu'a (the 'Indian'). In the story, a winged creature, Paškeza,[37] first kills the sea monsters threatening to swallow the ship, which has come dangerously close to the place where the precious stone of resurrection was hidden until the end of time. The fantastic creature then takes the miraculous stone into its possession, the ship is rescued and the stone will now be safely kept until the ordained time.

This story should be read in the light of another variant of a sea-voyage plot,[38] juxtaposed by the Talmudic editors.[39] Here the narrator relates that when traveling by ship, he and his companions saw in the water a small basket studded with precious stones and pearls guarded by a flock of giant *Karafish*.[40] When a diver, having

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[36] *Vita* 78.9.

[37] This mythological bird resembles the griffon. On its occurrence in Iranian lore, see L. C. Casartelli, 'Çyena – Simrgh – Roc,' *Congrès scientifique international des Catholiques* 6 (Paris, 1891), pp. 79–86; C. V. Trever, *The Dog-Bird. Senmurw-Paskudj* (Leningrad, 1938); W. Fauth, 'Der persische Simurg und der Gabriel-Melek Tāwūs der Jeziden,' *Persica* 12 (1987), pp. 123–147; H.-P. Schmidt, 'The Sēmurw: Of Birds and Dogs and Bats,' *Persica* 9 (1980), pp. 1–85; H.-P. Schmidt, 'Simorgh,' *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (forthcoming). On this creature in the Babylonian Talmud, see R. Kiperwasser, 'Rabba bar Bar Channa's Voyages,' *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 22 (2007–2008), pp. 215–242, p. 232.

[38] See Patai, *Ancient Jewish Seafaring*, pp. 126–127.

[39] See *b. Baba Bathra* 74b.

[40] See R. Kiperwasser and D. Y. Shapira, 'Irano-Talmudica I: The Three-Legged Ass and Ridyā in B. Taanith: Some Observations about Mythic Hydrology in the Babylonian Talmud and in Ancient Iran,' *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 32.1 (2008), pp. 101–116; R. Kiperwasser and D. Y. Shapira. 'Irano-Talmudica II: Leviathan, Behemoth and the 'Domestication' of Iranian Mythological Creatures in Eschatological Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud,' in S. Secunda and S. Fine (eds),

descended into the water to retrieve the basket with the precious stones succeeds in outsmarting the guardian sea creatures, the heavenly voice (*bat qol*) comes forth and demands of the seafarers: 'What have you to do with the small basket destined for r. Hanina b. Dosa's wife, who is to store in it the purple-blue (תכלתא) for the righteous in the world to come?' 'Purple-blue' here is the dye used for coloring the fringes of the traditional Jewish shawl (*talith*); the long-lost secret of its preparation will be restored, according to a popular belief, in eschatological times.[41] It deserves notice that from the point of view of the narrator both r. Hanina b. Dosa – a charismatic miracle-worker[42] – and his wife had long been dead and thus their mention here refers the audience to the future age of resurrection. It stands to reason that the eschatological focus of this story should also inform our understanding of the function of the precious stones in the above narrative of the ship's rescue.

In both narratives, a distinction can be suggested between a folk motif devoid of explicitly religious markers and an attempt at its 'Judaization.' The former motif presupposes that any storyteller sending his protagonist to explore the 'sea which is beyond the sea'

Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman (Leiden, 2012), pp. 203–236.

[41] The secret of this dye production was seemingly lost in ancient times. In rabbinic literature, it usually appears in a legendary context: It was once derived from a marine creature named *hillazon* in the Land of Israel and exported to Babylonia (*y. Ta'anit* 43b). It seems that the idea of the future discovery of the purple-blue in the eschatological era was invented among Babylonian Jewry; see R. Kiperwasser, 'Elihoref and Ahia – The Metamorphosis of the Narrative Tradition from the Land of Israel to the Sassanian Babylonia,' R. Nikolsky and T. Ilan (eds), *Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine and Babylonia: From There to Here* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 255–273.

[42] See J. Blenkinsopp, 'Miracles: Elisha and Hanina Ben Dosa,' in J. C. Cavadini (ed.), *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, In,, 1999), pp. 57–81; D. Levine, 'Holy Men and Rabbis in Talmudic Antiquity,' in J. Schwartz and M. Poorthuis (eds), *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 45–58; C. Safrai and Z. Safrai, 'Rabbinic Holy Men,' in *ibid*., pp. 59–78.

will relate – even if only for the amusement of the reader – the wondrous finds in the depths of the sea and the encounters with miraculous creatures. The latter, Judaizing one, establishes a link to religious values: the resurrection, ritual demands transferred to the hereafter and prominent rabbinic figures.

Granted that the author of Barsauma's *Vita* adopted here an existing *topos* of broader circulation, it is instructive that he feels the necessity to 'Christianize' it, adding an explanatory remark to the effect that in his 'opinion, this is not in fact a bird, but a *sign of peace* sent by God.' This remark wraps up the strategy of 'Christianization' begun with the call to 'give glory to God' at the beginning of the tempest episode. We may further note that in the Barsauma-elaboration of this common motif the central element of the supposed background folk story – namely, the mysterious gems-basket – is absent. The lack of interest in this topic may be understood in light of the difference in focus: whereas in the Talmud the emphasis is on the wonders of the sea-adventure, in Barsauma's *Vita* the sea travel is only a preface to the true climax of his heroic pilgrimage in the Holy Land.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have presented two cases exemplifying the reciprocal potential of a comparative study of Syriac Christian and Babylonian rabbinic sources, consciously choosing traditions that do not show signs of direct dependence or contact. In the first case, the comparative analysis of the sources representing the two minority groups both highlighted their different religious agendas and allowed for restoring otherwise unattested patterns of their broader cultural – namely, the 'pagan,' Mesopotamian/Babylonian – backdrop with which they converse. This 'restoration track' may be seen as analogous to the attempts, *mutatis mutandis*, to restore elements of first-century 'common Judaism' on the basis of patterns shared by two minority 'sectarian' groups represented by the Dead Sea Scrolls and earliest Christian writings.

The second case exemplifies how the Christian author of Barsauma's *Vita* adapts and 'baptizes' patterns of common cultural tradition concerning wondrous adventures of sea travel to suit his hagiographic polemical agenda. Characteristic here is a collation of a whole range of such folk patterns, with only light 'wrapping-up' strokes of Christianization added at the beginning and end of the

dramatic incident. In this sense, the second sea-storm episode,[43] related immediately after that in the *Vita* and addressed in Chapter Seven constitutes a corrective replay of sorts – with the folk elements omitted and Barsauma's role highlighted, the Christianization becomes complete. Comparison with rabbinic sources dealing with the same motifs of broader circulation while Judaizing them sheds light on the narrative strategies of both the Talmudic narrators and those of the *Vita*'s Christian author.

[43] *Vita* 78.7.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
COMPETITION FOR SACRED SPACE: BARSAUMA'S *VITA* AND RABBINIC TRADITIONS

This chapter addresses narrative strategies in the story of Barsauma's pilgrimages to the Holy Land, as an expression of negotiating a Christian identity in a late antique Syriac-speaking milieu, analyzed comparatively vis-à-vis other Christian hagiographic stories as well as some rabbinic literary traditions. It is argued that unlike a well-attested pattern of pilgrimage as the 'seal of Christian formation,'[1] Barsauma's *Vita* portrays him as an already accomplished ascetic and mystic coming from the East, not on a journey of initiation but rather on a fierce crusade to purify the holy places.[2] In the context of this overarching scheme, we discuss the descriptions of Barsauma's encounters with various segments of the population of Palestine: Samaritans,[3] 'deviant' – namely, non-monophysite – Christians in control of the holy places (seemingly an anachronistic monophysite propaganda ploy against the Chalcedonian Church), pagans, members of the imperial administration, and Jews.

With regard to the Jews, who are an important focus of discussion here, it is shown that within the composition's polemical

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[1] B. Bitton-Ashkeloni, 'From Sacred Travel to Monastic Career: The Evidence of Late Antique Syriac Hagiography,' *Adamantius* 16 (2010), pp. 353–370.

[2] See the forthcoming preliminary edition, A. Palmer, *Life of Barsauma* (=*Vita*).

[3] For the Samaritans in the *Vita*, see J. Hahn (forthcoming).

framework they fulfill a double function. First, Jews are portrayed as competing with Christians for presence and dominance in Jerusalem, propagating their own sacred geography.[4] Second, empathy toward local Jewry, shown by some Christians, serves a secondary indication of the latter's heretical deviations. The polemic reaches its climax with the Jews plotting – under the patronage of Empress Eudocia – to renew their own festive pilgrimages to the Temple Mount. This narrative unit of the *Vita* is analyzed in light of other roughly contemporaneous Christian compositions justifying forceful appropriation of synagogues and, emphatically, of a midrashic tradition from *Genesis Rabbah* rejecting Jewish activist aspirations for rebuilding the Temple. As an aside to the chapter's emphasis on narrative strategies, the possible relevance of the suggested analysis for establishing a likely historical setting for this particular component of Barsauma's story is also outlined.[5]

Barsauma has traveled to the Holy Land four times, visiting Jerusalem on each occasion but heading there directly only on his fourth pilgrimage. Apart from Jerusalem, the *Vita* includes descriptions of his journeys to Sebastia and to Sinai, Petra and Rabat Moab – namely, places adjacent to the Holy Land south and east of it.[6] Noticeable is that the Galilee with its prominent Jewish population and important urban centers is missing from the itinerary of our ascetic paragon. Yet the importance of the Galilee, as well as its Jewish population, was clearly acknowledged by the narrator, according to whom, as we shall see, it was particularly from the Galilee that a multitude of Jews inspired by messianic hopes would rush to Jerusalem.

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[4] On the contest for sacred space, see H. Sivan, 'Subversive Pilgrimages: Barsauma against Jerusalem' (forthcoming); A. Kofsky and S. Ruzer, 'Pilgrimage and Appropriation of the Holy Places and of the Jewish Past in Early Fifth Century Christian Discourse,' in L. Matassa and J. Silverman (eds) (Leiden, forthcoming).

[5] Cf., e.g., G. Stemberger, 'Barsauma's Travels to the Holy Land and Jewish History' (forthcoming); J. W. Drijvers, 'Barsauma, Eudocia, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount,' (forthcoming).

[6] F. Nau, 'Deux épisodes de l'histoire de la Vie de Barsauma le Syrien,' *Revue des Études Juives* 83–84 (1927), pp. 188–191.

As noted, unlike typical pilgrimage stories that usually comprise a single visit to the Holy Land, marking the completion of the process of ascetic initiation,[7] Barsauma makes a number of pilgrimages, aiming to restore the 'orthodoxy' of the lapsed Christian community in the Holy Land. Already in the preliminary exposition preceding the travel itself, Barsauma appears as an accomplished ascetic and wonder worker, distinguished especially by his healing powers. According to the plot frame of the *Vita*, the point of departure of Barsauna's ascetic career was the humiliation suffered during his first pilgrimage to the Holy land at the hands of hostile Jews. His miraculous powers, however, would be fully formed and first manifested later – and that outside the Holy Land.

Apart from his healing powers and the ability to subdue demons and overcome natural disasters, there is in Barsaumas's stories an important leitmotiv, lending the shade of a successful military campaign to all his works. From Barsauma's second pilgrimage onward, the narrator depicts him as judging and punishing his opponents, portrayed as sinners and villains of the Christian community. One can discern here a certain model serving the needs of the narrative: the holy stranger arriving at a hostile place 'occupied' by deviant Christians and through his acts of power restoring the proper order. The culmination of this chain of restorative acts takes place in Jerusalem; but let us first present several representative examples of Barsauma's feats outside of Palestine.

(a) In one of the cities on his way from Syria to Cappadocia Barsauma's spiritual authority and miracle-performing ability are tested by the local clergy. Barsauma manages to heal a man possessed by a demon, thus demonstrating his ascetic prowess, then recognized by the bishop and his entourage.[8]

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[7] See Bitton-Ashkeloni, 'From Sacred Travel to Monastic Career.'

[8] See *Vita* 60.4–6. One may note that the plot of a stranger coming from the East whose religious abilities are put to test is attested also in rabbinic sources (e.g., *b. Bava Qama* 117a–b). See G. Hermann, 'The Story of Rav Kahana (BT Baba Qamma 117a–b) in Light of Armeno-Persian Sources,' *Irano-Judaica* 6 (2008) (ed. S. Shaked), pp. 53–86.

(b) When Barsauma is asked to intervene on behalf of monks who had escaped from their monastery invaded by a monstrous snake, he, like Hercules, splits the evil creature – seemingly representing the serpent cursed by God in the Garden of Eden (ܚܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܝܡ) – 'in two from head to tail (ܒܬܪܝܢ ܡܢ ܪܫܐ ܘܥܕ ܣܘܦܐ ܗܘ ܐܬܦܠܓ).'[9] Barsauma thus cleanses the Christian site of all impurity.

(c) A delegation from a nearby small Christian town complains to Barsauma against its 'administrator' (ܐܦܝܛܪܘܦܐ), who treats them with cruelty. The ascetic curses the man *in absentia*, and he – as the reader learns from the continuation of the narrative – dies at the very instant when the curse is pronounced.[10]

If in these three episodes Barsauma acts only vis-à-vis local Christians, a further episode delineates the boundaries between Christians and their pagan neighbors. The story tells of a man from 'the race of the tribe of the Isaurians (ܡܢ ܙܪܥܐ ܕܫܒܛܐ ܕܐܝܣܘܪܐ),' which was 'barbarian (ܒܪܒܪܝܐ).'[11] It is told that in a certain Christian town he met a woman who was a 'daughter of covenant (ܒܬ ܩܝܡܐ, *bnat qyama*)'.[12] The barbarian coaxed her to accompany him,

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[9] *Vita* 55.

[10] *Vita* 61. One notes that the narrative pattern of 'checking the hour' is a broader *topos*. Unlike our story, however, it appears in rabbinic narratives in connection to a 'positive miracle' – see, for example, *t. Sotah* 13.5 ('Yohanan the high priest heard from the holy of holies about the victory of the young fellows who were going to engage in battle in Antioch and put down in writing the exact hour and day, and it turned out that exactly at that hour they were victorious'); cf. *b. Sotah* 33a.

[11] *Vita* 66.1 See H. Elton, 'The Nature of the Sixth-Century Isaurians,' in S. Mitchell and G. Greatrex (eds), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London, 2000), pp. 293–307; L. Honey, 'Justifiably Outraged or Simply Outrageous? The Isaurian Incident of Ammianus Marcellinus 14.2,' in H. A. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 47–55.

[12] On this phenomenon, see A. Voöbus, 'The Institution of the *Benai Qeiama* and the *Benat Qeiama* in the Ancient Syrian Church,' *Church History* 30 (1961), pp. 19–27; S. P. Brock, 'Early Syrian Asceticism,' *Numen* 20 (1970), pp. 1–19 (=*Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* [London, 1984],

to change her holy garments for weekday clothes and become his wife – thus relinquishing her religious vocation. Having heard about it, Barsauma sends seven of his brethren to the city, and they take the woman intending to return her to the bosom of her community. The locals, however, assail them with sticks and stones, beat them and kidnap the woman. Barsauma's response highlights the importance of the demarcation between the two worlds: He brings upon the city a deadly epidemic. In the end, the city elders beg him to stop the plague, which he duly does.[13] The shocked barbarian pleads with Barsauma to forgive him and agrees to send his wife to a monastery. The drama reaches its climax when the young woman, surrendering to the longing for her barbarian – or as explained by the narrator, taken over by the devil – decides to abandon the monastery and search for her husband. On the road, the curse of Barsauma reaches her and she dies instantaneously.

Barsauma therefore upholds and stabilizes the borderline between the Christian community and outsiders. The woman – here defined as *bat kyama*, namely one who belongs to the very core of Christian religious practice – acts as a liminal figure, a weak link in the chain of Jesus' true followers. Thus already at an early stage

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chapter 1); S. H. Griffith, '"Singles" in God's Service: Thoughts on *Ihidaye* from the Works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian,' *The Harp* 4 (1991), pp. 145–159; S. H. Griffith, 'Monks, "Singles," and the "Sons of the Covenant": Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology,' in E. Carr, A. A. Thiermeyer and E. Velkovska (eds), *Euloghema: Studies in Honor of R. Taft* (Rome, 1993), pp. 141–160; S. H. Griffith, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism,' in V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds), *Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 220–245.

[13] This miracle belongs to a series of similar miraculous acts attributed to Barsauma; see, for instance, *Vita* 49, where in order to perform the miracle Barsauma offers not only supplication prayers but a Eucharist offering as well. According to Vööbus (*History of Asceticism*, vol. 1, p. 207), for ascetics like Barsauma the Eucharist could have been not only a religious act but also the almost singular source of nourishment. See also *Vita* 71–72, where the victory over the plague is also a victory over Satan, and a disciple of Barsauma is enabled to see a vision of Satan kneeling in front of the ascetic before being expelled.

of Barsauma's mission, before his arrival in Palestine, the narrative establishes that the ascetic's journeys have a well-defined aim – cleansing the Holy Land and its surroundings, first and foremost local Christian communities that have deteriorated to a dangerously corrupted spiritual stance. Along his route, Barsauma had repeatedly to act to restore the religious life of these communities, over which demonic forces had gained dominance. If not for Barsauma's arrival, the situation would have become hopeless, and it is only thanks to his presence that the sinful Christians and the demons themselves were properly punished and Christian holiness was restored. This plot line prepares the reader for the future collisions of Barsauma in the Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular. Moreover, in Palestine the scope of cleansing would be widened to include also Samaritans, representatives of the imperial authorities and, finally, Jews.[14]

To this preliminary stage also belongs an episode on the high seas. When a ship is wrecked in a storm near the coast of Gaza, its Jewish captain has a dream about a ruddy-faced figure wearing iron chains beneath his sackcloth who is about to rescue them from death.[15] Moreover, the Jew, following his vision will eagerly convert to Christianity, declaring that in his vision Barsauma was proclaimed as capable of subduing all demonic forces.

The first visit of Barsauma to the Holy Land, which had happened when he was young and at the very beginning of his ascetic career, already included the nucleus of conflict, which would grow larger and more violent in its later reenactments:[16]

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[14] Vööbus singled out the collation between extreme asceticism and socio-political activism as an outstanding feature of Syro-Persian monasticism; see A. Vööbus, 'The Origins of Monasticism in Mesopotamia,' *Church History* 20.4 (1951), pp. 27–37, esp. pp. 27, 30.

[15] See *Vita* 79.2.

[16] *Vita* 4.2:

ܣܬܩ ܒܝ ܚܕ ܐܚܐ: ܗܝ ܚܕ ܒܝܡ ܐܠܐ ܚܠܠ ܘܟܬܒ ܒܗ ܐܬ ܕܒ ܐܬ ܕܒ ܐܬ ܕܒ

> But the pagans at that time were numerous in the country of Palestine, and in the region of Phoenicia and of the Arabs. The Christians were as yet few in number in those countries; whereas the Jews and the Samaritans were rich and persecuted the Christians in that region. As for the blessed Barsauma, they could see that he was a child and that there was no one else with him. For that reason, they used to persecute him and beat him and torment him in every place, then drive him out.

The motif, which can be viewed as a topos, is documented both in rabbinic literature and in Greek sources of late antiquity: A youthful foreigner comes to the city and being young and insignificant is ridiculed and attacked by natives. This topos is mobilized by the narrator to highlight a conflict between an ascetic Christian and his Others: Jews, Samaritans and pagans. The *Vita* here expresses a perception according to which pagans had constituted a dominant subgroup of the population of Palestine – other sources also indicate pagans holding key positions in the local administration – and were indifferent to the plight of Christians. The violence of the Others against the defenceless protagonist during his early journey, devoid of a successful ending, is avenged in Barsauma's later pilgrimages, when the ascetic's great deeds teach a lesson to his rivals. The weakness of ordinary Christians will soon be compensated for by the power of the thaumaturgic ascetic.

The story of Barsauma's second journey can be read as a depiction of revenge on all those communities that were unwelcoming during his first visit to the Holy Land.[17] The extremely violent scene concluding this militant journey, which according to Nau took place in 419–422, describes Barsauma's band zealously destroying Jewish and Samaritan synagogues (ܒܝܥ ܨܘܡܥܐ ܘܒܥܬܐ ܗܕܐ ܘܬܩܘܡ, ܒܝܥ) as well as pagan temples (ܒܝܥ

See also F. Nau, 'Resumé de monographies syriaques,' *Revue de l'orient chrétien* 18 (1913), p. 274; Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 186.

[17] *Vita* 34; Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 185–186; Nau, 'Resumé 1913,' pp. 273–274.

ܫܒܬܐ ܘܣܩܠ).[18] In subsequent episodes, however, no further punishments are meted out to Samaritans.[19] Going through Rabat Moab, Barsauma's band destroyed what the author calls 'the house of the Sabbath of the Jews (ܒܝܬ ܫܒܬܐ ܕܝܗܘܕ).' The description of the beautiful synagogue in Rabat Moab, 'unmatched anywhere, only the Temple of Solomon could equal it,' encouraged scholars to examine the historical credibility of this picture. Some recognized certain archaeological relics discovered in the 19th century as belonging to that synagogue; nowadays, however, a more skeptical tendency prevails.[20] One may note that whereas in the first and second rounds Jews and Samaritans (and pagans) appear together as the collective competitive Other of the Christians, in the later stages their appointed role as the Other will differ.

Barsauma's conduct remains aggressive and violent during his following journeys to Palestine; the reader is duly informed that he and his entourage destroyed various synagogues and temples. Based on a comparison with the Life of Simon the Stylite, Nau has suggested that in the wake of the violent disturbances that characterized Barsauma's journey, the prefect Askleodotos – Empress Euodocia's uncle, at that time still a pagan – promoted legislation to protect Jewish and pagan places of worship.[21] Nau's suggestion resonates with contemporaneous incidents of the destruction and appropriation of synagogues and pagan sanctuaries in various provinces – e.g., the synagogue in Minorca and the Serapis temple in Alexandria – by zealous Christians that sometimes engendered restraining responses by the authorities.[22]

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[18] *Vita* 34.1; Nau, 'Resumé 1913,' p. 382; Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 190–191.

[19] Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' p. 187.

[20] See Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 190 (and note 3 there); Stemberger, 'Barsauma's Travels to the Holy Land and Jewish History.'

[21] See Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 192–193.

[22] See e.g., P. C. Dilley, 'The Invention of Christian Tradition: "Apocrypha," Imperial Policy, and Anti-Jewish Propaganda,' *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010), pp. 586–614; R. Boustan and J. E. Sanzo, 'Mediterranean Jews in a Christianizing Empire,' in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila* (New York, 2014), pp. 360–376.

However, with no actual destruction reported during the last two voyages, the *Vita* focuses on the enthusiastic pilgrim's encounters with representatives of various communities whose presence in the Holy Land is deemed important by the author. These stories create a group portrait of the Others, set opposite the portrait of our ascetic protagonist. These fateful encounters of the Persian monk during his sojourn in Palestine are with Samaritans, pagans, Jews and 'deviant' Christians, as well as with provincial authorities.

The visit to Sebastia on the third trip, and the encounter with a Samaritan Other, inaugurates the sequence of encounter episodes vis-à-vis different groups residing in the Holy Land. The Samaritan Other is depicted as a 'teacher of the Law' and the debate between the two focuses on the interpretation of Scripture, in which Barsauma gains the upper hand thanks to his superior exegetical prowess. The Samaritan, deeply impressed by Barsauma's intellectual acumen, divulges to the ascetic the fatal illness of his dying wife. He begs Barsauma to pray for a miracle and declares that if his wife is healed it would be proof of the superiority of Barsauma's faith and that he and his family would then embrace Christianity. However, instead of praying, the ascetic healer instructs the Samaritan to anoint the sick woman with the sacred 'oil of prayer.'[23]

The Samaritan argues that the Torah forbids the use of Christian oil, apparently reflecting a certain religious sensitivity. A similar sensitivity to healing by oil associated with the religious belief of the Other is documented in the following rabbinic tradition:

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[23] Such a narrative strategy, counterpoising the expectation of help to Barsauma's unwillingness to follow the 'trodden path' and offering an alternative 'treatment' instead, seems to be tailored to magnify the effect of the miracle. This strategy features also in additional healing episodes, but the exact nature of the tension may vary from one episode to another. Thus, for instance, the people of Haran also ask for Barsauma's prayer, to which he replies that he is confident that the Messiah, before whom he is about to prostrate himself in Jerusalem (ܗܘ ܕܐܬܝ ܘܐܫܬܚܐ ܩܕܡܘܗܝ ܒܝܪܘܫܠܡ ܘܐܫܪܐ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ), will help them (*Vita* 76.3).

Kohelet Rabbah (Eccl. R.) 1.4

חנינא בן אחי ר' יהושע אזל להדא כפר נחום ועבדין ליה מינאי מילא ועלון יתיה רכיב חמרא בשבתא אזל לגבי ר' יהושע חביביה ויהב עלוי משח ואסיתיה אמ' ליה מכיון דאתער בך חמרא דההוא רשיעא לית את יכיל שרי בארעא דישראל נחת ליה מן תמן לבבל ודמך תמן.

Hanina, nephew of r. Joshua, went to Capernaum, where heretics (*minaye*) cast a spell (*mila*) on him. They sat him on a donkey on the Sabbath. He went to r. Joshua, his dear uncle, who anointed him with oil and healed him. He (r. Joshua) said, 'Because you imbibed the wine of that wicked man, you cannot stay in the Land of Israel.' He went from there to Babylonia and died there.

This short story is part of a chain of episodes illustrating the verse 'All things are full of weariness' (Eccl 1:8), which among other things discuss the destructive power of *minut* (heresy) and its ramifications.[24] Hanina, the nephew of Rabbi Joshua, visited Capernaum, a town with a Jewish and Christian population in Galilee, where he was harassed by local heretics (*minim*) who cast on him a magical spell (*mila*).[25] Under the spell, he violated the Sabbath; therefore, after his return home, his uncle, Rabbi Joshua healed him with oil functioning here as an antidote that neutralizes the spell of the Other. The spell was apparently enhanced by drinking the wine explicitly associated with 'that wicked man' – seemingly a reference to the Eucharistic wine. But the efficacy of the treatment is short-lived – hence the spiritually weak nephew is sent into exile, to Babylonia, where he will be far away from illicit

[24] The meaning of 'minut/minim' remains contested, but see S. S. Miller, 'The "Minim" of Sepphoris reconsidered,' *Harvard Theological Review* 86.4 (1993), pp. 377–402; M. Goodman, 'The Function of "Minim" in Early Rabbinic Judaism,' *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion* I (1996), pp. 501–510; A. Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 102–103, 210 n. 9.

[25] On *mila* as a magical utterance, see D. Sperber, *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan, 1994), pp. 60–66.

social encounters. Here too, as in the case of Barsauma, religious conflict takes the form of a contest between two methods of healing, with trivial materials (wine, oil) being identified with two rival religious identities correspondingly.

As for Barsauma, he finally convinced the Samaritan to use 'the oil of prayer' and, as the remedy worked, the woman was immediately cured and the family embraced the Christian faith. Thus the conflict between the Christian pilgrim and the indigenous representative ended with the victory of the Christian holy man. The Samaritan issue, however, is further developed, reaching its climax in yet another encounter with the members of the community (*Vita* 84). Here we find the same basic structure of theological debate, beginning with the sacred text and its interpretation and culminating in a typical healing narrative. Whereas in the description of the previous meeting the specific topic of discussion remains vague, here the framework of the debate is set explicitly – it is about the resurrection of the dead. As might be expected, this theme is presented as a line of demarcation between the Christian belief and that of the Samaritans. The Samaritans are depicted as denying that the resurrection is promised by their Holy Writ – the five books of Moses. The narrator relates that they also deny the Holy Spirit and the existence of angels. Obviously, the last two components, not essential for the development of the plot, are derived from Acts 23:7–8. But whereas in Acts as well as elsewhere in the New Testament, Josephus – and implicitly also in rabbinic texts – these appear as salient tenets of the Sadducees, our narrator transposes them onto his polemical portrayal of the Samaritans.[26] The act of

[26] See Matthew 22:23–33 and pars.; Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.8; *Antiquities of the Jews* 18; *m. Sanh.* 10:1. See also E. Main, *Les Sadducéens et l'origine des partis juifs de la période du Second Temple* (unpubl. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 2004), Chapter 2: 'L'explication religieuse : foi ou indifférence religieuse des Sadducéens?'; G. G. Stroumsa, 'Le couple de l'ange et de l'esprit: traditions juives et chrétiennes,' in G. G. Stroumsa, *Savoir et salut* (Paris, 1992), pp. 23–41; E. Regev, *The Sadducees and Their Halakhah: On Religion and Society in the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem, 2005). On Samaritans in

healing is tellingly replaced in the second encounter with the Samaritans by reviving a dead person – turning the belief in resurrection into a constitutive identity marker.

Barsauma's powers are thus demonstrated twice: in his ability to prove the resurrection from Scripture, and to actually revive a dead boy – and this ultimately moved the Samaritans to a mass conversion to Christianity. Accordingly, the Samaritan story has two layers: the actual resurrection builds upon the previous scene, where Barsauma proved the resurrection exegetically. In the second act, the corpse of a boy who has died recently is brought by the Samaritans and placed in the center of the marketplace. The healer, holding the boy's hand (ܒܝܕܗ ܘܩܒܠܗ ܚܒܫ ܡܪܝ) commands him to stand up (*talya qum*, ܩܘܡ ܛܠܝܐ) in the name of the Messiah whom Barsauma reveres. We encounter here, in fact, a combination of two healing *topoi* – one recorded in Mark 5:41, according to which Jesus revived a girl, taking her by the hand and saying to her 'Talitha qumi (girl, arise).' The second *topos*, a master holding the hand of his disciple and ordering him to rise from his sick bed, is common in healing stories in the Babylonian Talmud.[27]

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rabbinic literature, see L. H. Schiffman, 'The Samaritans in Tannaitic Halakhah,' *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 (1984–85), pp. 323–350. See also P. W. van der Horst, 'Anti-Samaritan Propaganda in early Judaism,' in P. W. van der Horst (ed.), *Persuasion and Dissuasion in Early Christianity, Ancient Judaism, and Hellenism* (Leuven, 2003), pp. 25–44; A. Lehnardt, 'The Samaritans (Kutim) in the Talmud Yerushalmi: Constructs of "Rabbinic Mind" or Reflections of Social Reality,' in P. Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III* (Tübingen, 2002), pp. 139–160; A. Lehnardt, 'Massekhet Kutim and the Resurrection of the Dead Samaritans,' in M. Mor, and F. V. Reiterer (eds), *Samaritans: Past and Present* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 175–192; E. Friedheim, 'Some Notes about the Samaritans and the Rabbinic Class at the Crossroads,' ibid., pp. 193–202; M. Lavee, 'The Samaritan May be Included: Another Look at the Samaritan in Talmudic Literature,' ibid., pp. 147–173.

[27] See, for example, *b. Ber.* 5b: 'He (the master) told him: give me your hand; he gave him (his hand) and he (the master) raised him' (אמר ליה: הב לי ידך! יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה).

Thus, the dead boy had risen and, accompanied by his father and brother, gone directly to the evening prayers at the church Barsauma attended. Interestingly, whereas the narrative of pilgrimage juxtaposes the Samaritans and the Christian protagonist in a clear framework of successful missionary effort, it does not describe such efforts vis-á-vis the Jews. The Samaritan Others are in fact perceived as not essentially different from the Jews but are still identified as a separate and preferred group.[28]

In the course of this sojourn in Palestine, Barsauma had also to address the case of a popular 'prophesying youth (ܥܠܡܒܚܐ),' who won over even the clergy with his ability to predict the future (ܡܪܡܐ). Barsauma summoned the boy's father and demanded that the boy's prophetic activities be prohibited. His demand is based on the premise that these activities are not inspired by the Holy Spirit but derive from diabolic possession.[29] Despite all attempts of the father to persuade our protagonist that the boy's prophesies are indeed legitimate and he should be allowed to communicate his visions, Barsauma remained adamant and cursed the child, declaring that the 'spear of the Lord' would punish him.[30]

Immediately after Barsauma's departure, the boy's father died and was buried by his fellow townsmen, who sent a delegation, joined by the prophetic boy himself and his brother, to the protagonist, begging for mercy. Barsauma concluded his wondrous performance by exorcising the demons (ܙܘܥܣܐ ܚܬܥܠܐ, ܘܢܬܐ) from the brothers. The absence of any religiously oriented debate in this story may indicate that the collision is designed as an internal

[28] In rabbinic sources, though, the otherness of the Samaritans would be strongly emphasized only in later layers of the Babylonian Talmud. See Lavee, 'The Samaritan May be Included,' p. 163. For the possible background of such a preferential attitude toward the Samaritans, see Friedheim, 'Some Notes about the Samaritans,' p. 197; A. D Crown, 'The Byzantine and Moslem Period,' in A. D Crown (ed.),*The Samaritans* (Tübingen, 1989), pp. 70–73.

[29] *Vita* 86.1.

[30] *Vita* 86.3.

Christian contest.[31] This story, then, continues to develop the central motif of the church being cured of its sickness by the holy ascetic outsider.

BARSAUMA IN JERUSALEM

The visit of Barsauma to Jerusalem is the highlight of his Holy Land travelogues. The city and its sacred geography, familiar from other pilgrims' accounts, feature prominently in the *Vita*.[32] The ascetic passed his first day in Jerusalem in the Church of the Anastasis and the adjacent Golgotha, retiring for the night to the monastery of the Church of Holy Sion. It is there that the relics of Stephen the proto-martyr had been first deposed before being transferred to the Church of Stephen, built for that purpose by Empress Eudocia in the mid-fifth century, outside the northern gate of the city.[33] In the middle of the night, however, our hero

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[31] One may note that the Syriac terminology of 'priests and scribes (صهتا, صهتا)' is routinely applied in Syriac sources to Christian priests and religious instructors. See M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 2009), pp. 601, 1035. Cf. the combination of 'scribes and Pharisees' widely used in the Gospel narrative, e.g. in Matthew 23.

[32] See, for example, P. Maraval, 'Les itinéraires de pèlerinage en Orient (entre le 4e et le 7e s.),' *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 20.1 (1995), pp. 291–300; J. Wilkinson (tr.), *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 49, 53. As all the sites mentioned belong to the common map of holy sites in late antique pilgrimage accounts, their list does not necessarily corroborate either the author's actual acquaintance with Jerusalem or the historicity of the text.

[33] See E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–460* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 218, 233; K. G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 1982), pp. 112–228; E. A. Clark, 'Claims on the Bones of Saint Stephen: The Partisans of Melania and Eudocia,' *Church History* 51 (1982), pp. 141–156; A. Kofsky and A. Spitzer, 'The Invention of Stephen's Tomb,' in Y. Hen and I. Shagrir (eds), *Ut videant et contingant: Essays on Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in Honour of Ora Limor* (Raanana, 2011), pp. 29–48.

returned to the atrium of the 'Golgotha church' (i.e., the Basilica of the Martyrion), where a crowd of pilgrims was passing the night.

One of the pilgrims was possessed by a demon, and the discreet appearance of Barsauma apparently serves the narrative's need to take the demon by surprise.[34] It is significant that a stranger, a Persian pilgrim, performed the successful exorcism, purifying the holiest Christian site. One discerns here an implied criticism of the Jerusalem Christians, who were not only unable to accomplish this task but were even unaware of the demonic possession in their midst.[35] There is, however, no hint here of any theological debate – the rivalry between Barsauma and the locals, as in the case of the prophesying youth, seems rather to revolve around the question of authority and miraculous powers.

Within the narrative timeframe, Empress Eudocia was residing in the city,[36] and thus, in addition to the holy sites proper, Barsauma also visits the royal residence. Also mentioned are the ruins of the Jewish Temple. The *Vita*'s urban map of Jerusalem would not be complete without the municipal prison, wherein the monks of Barsauma's entourage would later be incarcerated.[37] The first encounter with the empress, which took place during Barsauma's third sojourn in Palestine, is described as relatively peaceful, though already here one may discern signs of tension. Eudocia, who initiated the meeting, had sent in advance a huge amount of gold to the monk as a royal gift, but he declined it. The empress then begged him to visit her. During the audience, Eudocia fell at the Persian ascetic's feet and asked for his spiritual guidance. Barsauma advised her to distribute alms as a sure path to salvation; moreover, citing Daniel 4:27 ('…break off your sins with almsgiving'), he in fact compared her spiritual stance before

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[34] *Vita*, 82.1.

[35] For exorcism in the Church of the Anastasis, see also Jerome, *Letter 46*.

[36] The question as to whether the narrative refers here to her first short sojourn, in 438, or to her prolonged residence in the city, between 444 (after separation from Theodosios II) and her death in 460, is unresolved.

[37] *Vita* 93–94.

meeting him with that of the wicked king of Babylon.[38] The empress wondered how the gift of alms – which would not demand from her a true sacrifice – would be sufficient for receiving forgiveness of sins, but Barsauma overcame her resistance, relying on the witness of the Gospel (Matt 5:7; 25:31–46). The narrator therefore not only presents the empress as submissive but further indicates that she was a sinner.[39]

However, the most dramatic encounter between the two occurred during Barsauma's fourth journey, with its ensuing collision regarding the empress' supposedly pro-Jewish sympathies. It is claimed that the root of the conflict was the Galilean Jews' ingratiation with Eudocia, causing her to grant their request to assemble at the Temple Mount to mourn the destruction of their ancient sanctuary. This apparently refers to additional occasions other than the Ninth of Ab (August), the traditional date of the destruction of both the First and Second Jewish Temples, when Jews had long been allowed by the Roman authorities to visit the site (ܒܝܘܡ ܕܫܒܝܥ ܒܐܒ ܠܐ ܡܟܠܝܢ ܐܢܫܐ ܘܐܢܫܬܐ ܠܡܐܬܐ ܒܝܘܡ ܕܫܒܝܥ).[40]

The Jews interpreted Eudocia's permission as not only canceling the old Hadrianic/Constantinian ban on residing in and around Jerusalem,[41] but as a sign of imminent redemption and the ingathering of the exiles. They therefore sent epistles to their brethren throughout the empire, exhorting them to come to Jerusalem for the upcoming holiday of Tabernacles (Sukkot), during which the kingdom of Israel would be re-established:

> In the letters of the Jews were written the following words: 'To the great and strong people of the Jews from the priests and leaders of Galilee: warm greetings! We write to inform you that

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[38] *Vita* 83.4.

[39] On Eudocia's putative 'sins,' see *Vita*, note 111.

[40] *Vita* 91.1. Cf. Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' 196–197. Cf. the description in Jerome, *Commentary on Zephaniah* 1.15–16. See also H. Newman, *Jerome and the Jews* (unpubl. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), p. 172.

[41] See O. Irshai, 'Constantine and the Jews: The Prohibition against Entering Jerusalem – History and Hagiography,' *Zion* 60 (1995), pp. 129–178.

> the time of the diaspora of our people is past. Behold, the day has arrived on which our tribes shall be reassembled. After all, the emperors of the Romans have decreed that our city, Jerusalem, is to be restored to us. Make haste, then, and come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, because our reign will then be established in Jerusalem!'[42]

Nau saw here the indication of a Jewish messianic revival following the favorable policies of the imperial authorities in Jerusalem and Antioch between 423 and 438. While in the region of Antioch the renowned Simon the Stylite forcefully opposed this tendency,[43] according to our *Vita*, it was Barsauma who fought against it in Jerusalem. He approached the Temple Mount on the first day of Sukkot, when the crowds of Jewish pilgrims were already there – the timing of his visit being deliberately calculated to thwart the intrigue of the empress and the Jews.

Barsauma, who stayed in the monastery of Holy Sion, later went to pray at the Siloam Spring, reputed for its healing powers, mentioned already in the Gospel of John (9:7).[44] It seems that the Siloam Spring was an obligatory stop on the route of late antique

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[42] *Vita* 91.4:

ܗܘ ܒܝܬ ܡܘܬܒܢ ܕܥܡܢ ܗܐ ܕܐܬܝ ܙܒܢ ܕܢܬܟܢܫ ܐܢܘܢ ܫܒܛܝ

Christian pilgrims.[45] Barsauma then returned to the monastery, but monks from his entourage continued on to the ruins of the Temple to witness the place where the devil had tempted Jesus at the corner of the sanctuary's roof.[46] The narrator seems to have intentionally presented the movements of Barsauma as distinct from those of his followers, emphasizing that during the whole day he was away from the Temple Mount, thus providing him with a solid alibi with regard to the upcoming skirmishes there. The *Vita* twice describes violent turmoil on the Temple Mount: as a report on the occurrence at the time of the event,[47] and in retrospect as related by the Jewish leaders, who would eventually be forced to concur with Barsauma's version.[48] Here is the first version of the *Vita*: People from Barsauma's retinue who came to the site of Jesus' temptation by Satan were surprised to find a great multitude of grieving Jews laying dust on their heads in a sign of mourning for the Temple. The number, 103,000 men and women, indicates that for the author this crowd comprised not only Galilean Jews

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[45] See, e.g., *Itinerarium burdigalense* 8–9 (ed. P. Geyer, in *Itinera Hierosolymitana: saeculi iiii–viii* [Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 39; Prague–Vienna–Leipzig, 1898]), p. 21; A. Stewart (tr.), *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem: 'The Bordeaux Pilgrim' (333 A. D.)* (London, 1887), pp. 19–20. See also O. Limor, *Pilgrimage Travels to the Holy Land: Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 32, 157, 160, 172–173, 183–184, 204. 230. 234–235. It is telling that pilgrimage accounts of Siloam Spring seem to have related not specifically to the evidence provided in the Gospel of John but rather to a broader Jewish tradition (which must have been the backdrop of John's narrative here): 'Also as you come out of Jerusalem to go up Mount Sion, on the left hand, below in the valley, beside the wall, is a pool which is called Siloe and has four porticoes and another large pool outside it. This spring runs for six days and nights, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, it does not run at all, either by day or by night. On this side one goes up Sion' (*Itinerarium burdigalense* 8). A church was built by Eudocia at the site, which is probably indicated also in the Madaba Map.

[46] See Matt 4:5–7 and pars.

[47] *Vita* 91–92.

[48] *Vita* 94.

but also Diaspora Jews who had responded to the call of the 'epistle of redemption.'[49] In fact, this behavior is rather unusual for the Sukkot celebration, when mourning is explicitly prohibited.[50]

The Jews therefore acted in accordance with the authorities' permission – praying for the restoration of the Temple. Witnessing the shocking scene, which for Barsauma's fellow travelers occurs at the locus of Satan's schemes, one of the monks is seized by deep anxiety. He begins urging his brothers to run away, for no doubt this impious gathering of criminal Jews, as well as bystanders, will be smitten in no time by God's wrath. The course of this narrative is clearly designed to create an alibi – this time for Barsauma's followers – denying any contact with the Jews on the Temple Mount and claiming instead that they desperately strove to avoid the Jews.[51]

Though the story is manifestly one-sided, it does reflect a collision between two interpretive narratives relating to the Temple Mount. For the Jews the place marks the site of destruction of past glory, where the divine presence still hovers over the ruins in expectation of revival. Yet for Barsauma's followers the site signifies the place of Satan's malicious designs, condemned to eternal desolation. As evidenced by the early sixth century *Short Description of Jerusalem*, the site of Jesus' temptation by Satan was part of the Christian itinerary of Jerusalem.[52] However, unlike in the *Vita*, where the nature of the Temple Mount is unequivocally defined in negative terms, in the *Short Description* the positive identification of the Mount with Solomon's Temple is maintained, and the place of Jesus' temptation is relegated to the margins of the compound.[53] It is noteworthy that the early fourth century Bordeaux pilgrim's account had already referred to the tower where the devil tried to tempt Jesus as being on the margins of the Mount, whereas the central area was associated with Solomon's

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[49] *Vita* 91.8

[50] See *m. Moed Qatan* 1:5, 3:5; *t. Moed Qatan* 2:9.

[51] *Vita* 91.9.

[52] See Limor, *Pilgrimage Travels to the Holy Land*, p. 197.

[53] Limor, *Pilgrimage Travels to the Holy Land*, p. 204.

Temple and, conspicuously, with the king's victory over the demons.[54]

In the *Vita*, the entire Temple compound is perceived through its connection to the devil; there is no expression of sympathetic curiosity toward the biblical sanctuary of Solomon. This lack of reverence is also clearly attested in the story of the destruction of the synagogue on the east bank of the Jordan River, addressed above, where the synagogue was explicitly likened to Solomon's Temple.[55] According to the *Vita*, precisely when Barsauma's monks were trying to escape from the Temple Mount, a murderous chaos broke out: a barrage of stones, screaming, dead bodies piling up. The Jews saw a vision of angels descending from heaven to avenge them. The author notes, however, that at this point it was not yet clear to those present, including the Jews, whence the lethal stones were being hurled at them. Whereas Barsauma's followers recognized here a punishment from heaven, the Jews refused to acknowledge that, preferring to believe it was the monks who were throwing the deadly stones.

The authorities, in collaboration with the Jews, apprehended the leader of the group – he who had previously advised his friends to run away – accusing the monks of the violent crime. Government officials, the Roman guard and the city clergy accepted in good faith the Jewish version of the events. They joined forces with the Jews and placed Barsauma's followers in custody for further interrogation. Having assembled their dead, the Jews went in a procession to the empress, who at that time was visiting Bethlehem, to demand justice. They emphasized that the perpetrators were strangers who came from distant Mesopotamia and defiled their monastic robes by their lawless conduct (ܚܩܠܗܡ ܕܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܒܥ̈ܠܐ ܕ̈ܡ ܟܬܡ̈ܐ ܐܗܟܡܐ ܡܢ ܪ̈ܚܩ̈ܐ ܕܐ̈ܬܘ ܘܐ̈ܬܢ ܠܡ̈ܚܬܐ ܥ̈ܡ ܚ̈ܠ ܒܩ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܡ ܟܬܡ̈ܐ).[56]

Eudocia initially intended to punish the murderous culprits by the rule of 'measure for measure': whoever killed a Jew by spear shall die by spear, whoever killed by sword, shall die by sword.

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[54] *Itinerarium burdigalense* 7.

[55] *Vita* 34.

[56] *Vita* 93.4; cf. F. Nau, 'Resumé de monographies syriaques,' *ROC* 18 (1913 p. 121.

(The reader should note that the Jews were killed not only by stones but also by spears and swords.) The empress and local clergy therefore went to examine the corpses and ascertain the cause of death.[57] A surprising development, however, hindered the procedures and, following the counter-advice of Eudocia's councilors, the authorities arrested the 'priests of the Jews (ܟܗܢܐ ܕܝܗܘܕܐ),' pressing them to reveal who had really caused the death of their coreligionists on the Temple Mount.[58] The *Vita* gives the following explanation for the sudden turn of events.[59] A Jewish woman, mourning the dead, suddenly collapsed and expired. This was the reason that 'the priests of the Jews,' fearing that the same fate would beset the rest of their brethren, came forward and acknowledged the innocence of the monks, confessing that in fact the disaster was effected by angels armed with luminous spears (ܡܠܐܟܐ ܕܒܢܘܗܪܐ ܘܒܪܘܡܚܐ ܕܐܬܚܙܘ ܠܗܘܢ).[60] Furthermore, the priests, who were immediately arrested and shackled, admitted that some of the victims had been trampled by the panic stricken crowd because of the menacing appearance of the Roman guard. All this is calculated by the narrative to dispel the original accusations against the monks.[61]

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[57] *Vita* 93.11–12.

[58] *Vita* 94.2. The phrase 'the priests of the Jews' can be interpreted as implying Aaronic priests as leaders of Galilean Jewry. Indeed, some scholars have speculated that even in late antiquity priestly families still constituted an alternative leadership to that of the rabbis; see O. Irshai, 'The Role of the Priesthood in the Jewish Community in Late Antiquity: A Christian Model?' in C. Cluse, A. Haverkamp and I. J. Yuval (eds), *Jüdische Gemeinden und ihr christlicher Kontext: Konzeptionen und Aspekte* (Hanover, 2003), pp. 75–85. However, since the author calls also the members of the Christian leadership 'priests' (*Vita* 69.1; 70.2), it is possible that this phrase denoted the leadership of the clergy in Christian society and was by analogy applied to the Jewish leadership as well – without identifying its specific character.

[59] *Vita* 94.1

[60] *Vita* 94.4.

[61] *Vita* 94.5.

The ambivalence of the narrator's attitude toward the local clergy is telling. On the one hand, local priests (قسيسا وحبرا) as well as government officials cooperated with the Jews to arrest the monks suspected of rioting and bring them to justice. Even Eudocia counts on the cooperation of the clergy in her attempt to punish the perpetrators.[62] On the other hand, when a turnaround in the legal process occurs, the clergy and the empress' confidants are described as leading the new course of action: coming to the prison and asking for the monks' forgiveness.

Meanwhile, a group of local bishops was gathering in Jerusalem to debate Barsauma's deeds. Originally inclined to accept Eudocia's position, they were soon persuaded by petitions of Barsauma's lay supporters to confront the empress:

> Now there happened to be many bishops present in Jerusalem during those days; when they heard the words of the Empress, they thought that her intention was to help the Jews…. Then all the Christians began to say one to another: 'The Empress intends to kill the brethren by a subterfuge.' For this reason, they began to say: 'Let us burn the Empress and all her entourage with fire!'[63]

The local clergy thus differ from the empress, who continues to be suspected by the masses (i.e., by the narrator) of sympathy for the Jews and of malicious intent against the monks. Even her insistence on bringing the governor (ܗܓܡܘܢܐ) from Caesarea to Jerusalem – a six-day journey according to the narrative – to release the prisoners, in compliance with judicial procedure (ܕܝܢܐ ܗܝܟܢܐ) and thus avoid accusations of bias from the Jews (ولا يجبرهم وحاقد بعضهم),

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[62] *Vita* 93.3–11.

[63] *Vita* 95.8:

ܘܗܘ ܒܗܢ ܝܘ ܒܝܘܡܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܒܝܪܘܫܠܡ ܣܓܝܐ ܡܢ ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܘ ܟܗܢܐ ܟܕ ܫܡܥܘ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܬܐ ܣܒܪܘ ܕܛܒܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕ ܠܝܗܘܕܝܐ ... ܘܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܐܢܫ ܠܚܒܪܗ ... ܗܐ ܡܠܟܬܐ ܒܥܝܐ ܠܡܩܛܠ ܠܟܠ ܐܚܝܢ ܒܥܠܬܐ ... ܘܥܠ ܗܢܐ ܡܬܚܠܝܢ ܠܡܐܡܪ

is presented as a ploy to prolong the ordeal of Barsauma's disciples.[64]

After six days, the governor arrived, and the struggle between the provincial imperial administration and the Christian mob would take a while before being resolved in favor of the Persian ascetic's followers.[65] The bishops eventually aligned with Barsauma against the Jews, but cooperation between them was limited to the Jewish problem, or rather to the struggle against the Jewish presence and influence in Jerusalem. Elsewhere in the narrative, the bishops consistently represent deviant forms of Christianity, opposing the protagonist, who is somewhat anachronistically presented as a radical monophysite. A good example is when the bishops try to offset the healing activities and exorcisms of Barsauma and send epistles to their parishes (ܠܟܢܘܫܐ ܠܫܬܐ), forbidding any contact with the Persian monk.[66] Moreover, in accordance with the contemporary style of religious polemics, the narrator does not hesitate to ascribe to demons a statement to the effect that the bishops are nothing but 'demon lovers and followers, being the ones who opened to demons the gates into the world of men (ܕܝ ܕܡ ܐܬܬܚܡܝܗ ܘܥܒܕܝ ܠܗ ܐܢܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܠܐܣ ܠܟ ܐܢܐ ܘܥܒܕ ܠܟ ܕܝ ܐܬܬܚܡܝܗ).'[67] If not for the prayers of the pious ascetic, who did not succumb to the demons and chased them zealously (ܡܥܒܐ), the demons would have prevailed over all the Christian communities of the province (ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܟܠܗ ܕܝ ܡܫܬܠܛ).[68]

There is no doubt about the nature of the agreement between the demons and the bishops that was the basis of their cooperation. The gate opened by the church for the demons is a gate of heresy (ܕܟܢܐ ܕܗܪܣܝܐ).[69] It turns out that the bishops and their followers share the belief that the body of Christ is entirely human (ܐܢܫܝܐ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܦܓܪܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܗܟܝ),[70] – a view vehe-

[64] *Vita* 95.6.

[65] *Vita* 95–96; see also Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 198–199.

[66] *Vita* 133.1.

[67] *Vita* 136.2–3.

[68] *Vita* 136.2.

[69] *Vita* 136.3.

[70] *Vita* 137.1.

mently opposed by the radical monophysite Barsauma.[71] The narrator puts the same quasi-Chalcedonian claim (ܗܠܝܢ ܘܒܥܘܕ ܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܕܐܢܐ ܗܠܝܢ) into the demon's mouth to emphasize the sinister character of the infidels' christology.[72] It is noteworthy that the demon speaks here through a woman, an apparently ascetic woman ('daughter of the covenant, ܒܬ ܩܝܡܐ') – possibly another example of the *Vita*'s critical stance vis-à-vis the high standing of feminine ascetics within the Syrian Church.[73]

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The general premise that the narrative strategies of the text serve the later radical monophysite agenda, characterizing its final redaction, seems plausible, as does the assumption that authentic early fifth-century elements remain embedded in the *Vita*. Drawing a clear distinction between echoes of historical circumstances and literary fiction is never a simple task. The portrait of the

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[71] See D. W. Winkler, 'Monophysites,' in G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Mass. – London, 1999), p. 586. The christological agenda of the sixth-century redactor of the *Vita* informs the anachronistic portrait of its protagonist as a fervent fighter against the quasi-Chalcedonian Jerusalem clergy, whereas, in fact, during Barsauma's sojourns in Palestine and until Chalcedon (451), the local church, headed by Bishop Juvenal of Jerusalem (422–458) as well as its patroness Empress Eudocia, while clearly differing from Barsauma's extreme stance, belonged to what may be branded as a 'mildly monophysite' Cyrillian camp. See E. A. J. Honigmann, 'Juvenal of Jerusalem,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), pp. 211–279.

[72] *Vita* 137.3. Though the author does not present what he views as a grave christological error as a Judaizing one – i.e., derived from Jewish influence – one should keep in mind that it was a well-attested pattern of intra-Christian polemics. See, for example, J. Behr, *The Case against Diodore and Theodore: Texts and Their Contexts* (Oxford, 2011).

[73] *Vita* 137, cf. *Vita* 66. Though Sons/Daughters of the Covenant did become from time to time objects of criticism, it was much milder than in the *Vita*. See Griffith, '"Singles" in God's Service.'

protagonist in the *Vita* appears to reflect, at least in general terms, the historical Barsauma and certain traits of contemporaneous Syriac Christianity, though one should, of course, bear in mind that the legendary character of the narrative inclined it to aggrandizement and exaggeration. Salient characteristics of Barsauma in the *Vita*, mostly corroborated by external evidence, include his extremely ascetic personality and his identification with a radically monophysite christological stance, accompanied by passionate hostility toward such variants of contemporaneous Christianity as Antiochene/semi-Nestorian, proto-Chalcedonian and even moderate one-principle-of-nature christological views, and violence against opponents of all kinds.[74]

The conflict with the bishops also fits well with the overall picture of ongoing confrontations between the holy ascetics and the Church establishment.[75] As suggested in earlier research, the difference in the pattern of Barsauma's actions between his second and later journeys may likewise reflect a historical reality – the necessity to adapt to new regulations in response to the violent conduct of zealous monks.[76] Even when the narrative clearly reflects the concerns of its later sixth-century redactional phase, it might still retain and reinforce earlier motifs now acquiring a new relevance.[77] Thus the radical stance ascribed to Barsauma against the notion of the humanity of Christ's body could have reflected an early christological trend, to be further refined in the context of the

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[74] See A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syriac Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East I–II*, CSCO 500, Subsidia 81 (Louvain, 1958–1988), vol. 1, pp. 198-208.

[75] See O. Ioan, 'Controverses entre la hiérarchie ecclésiale et les moines dans le christianisme syriaque,' in F. Jullien (ed.) *Le monachisme syriaque*, Études syriaques 7 (Paris, 2010), pp. 89–106. For the collision between a saint and bishops see P. Brown, 'Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80–101, esp. pp. 84–95. See also J. Ségui, 'Compte rendu de: Escolan (Philippe), *Monachisme et Église. Le monachisme syrien du IVe au VIIe siècle: un monachisme charismatique*,' *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 116 (2001), pp. 93–156.

[76] See Nau, 'Deux épisodes,' pp. 192–193.

[77] See Dilley, 'The Invention of Christian Tradition," p. 597.

Julianist-Severan polemic about the incorruptibility of Jesus' body. This polemic would continue for a long time to divide the church in Armenia and Syria-Mesopotamia, the geographical base of Barsauma's movement.[78]

We have focused on narrative strategies related to the dramatic conflict with the Jews in Jerusalem, especially during Barsauma's third and fourth pilgrimages, also involving Empress Eudocia, local Christians and government officials. We would like, however, to probe also the possible historical background of these strategies. This problem of the historical background was assessed by Oded Irshai, who concluded, contrary to earlier views, that this 'dim affair' is not at all historically credible. Irshai addressed Barsauma's story in the context of a discussion of the Hadrianic/Constantinian ban on the sojourn of Jews in Jerusalem, except for the annual mourning pilgrimage on the Ninth of Ab (see above). According to Irshai, the attribution of the ban to the first Christian emperor is legendary, invented by the church of Jerusalem for political reasons to enhance the sanctity of the city and establish the hegemony of the Jerusalem church against Jewish claims.[79] Irshai further argues that in the fifth century Constantine's reign would be painted in strongly idealistic colors and be viewed as a worthy period for etiological stories. Thus the story in the *Vita* about the Jewish assembly on the Temple Mount is without historical basis, being most likely invented by the author to add Constantinian prestige to the Hadrianic ban on the Jewish presence in the holy city.[80]

According to Irshai's arguments concerning the fictitious character of Constantine's ban, Jews had been banned from the city and its vicinity from the time of Hadrian, an ongoing prohibition – though often only mildly enforced – rather than a

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[78] See discussion in A. Kofsky, 'Julianism after Julian of Halicarnassus,' in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L. Perrone (eds), *Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Aspects of Thought and Practice in Eastern Christianity (5th to 8th Century)* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 251–294.

[79] See Irshai, 'Constantine and the Jews.' See also Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 217–218.

[80] See Irshai, 'Constantine and the Jews,' pp. 162–163.

proscription firmly established during the reign of Constantine. This understanding, however, does highlight the historical importance of our story, albeit in a different sense – as the *Vita* seems to reflect faithfully the perceptions promoted by the Jerusalem Church in the relevant period. These perceptions, concerning the imminent danger of a Jewish *reconquista* of Jerusalem and suspicion of the authorities' collaboration with the Jews, formed an integral part of the common culture influencing hagiographic stories. In the case of our *Vita*, these perceptions engendered an important literary invention – namely, the image of an empress who has abandoned the ways of Constantine, the prototypical Christian emperor, and is now ready, like Julian the Apostate, to usher the Jews into the holy place.

In the early twentieth century, François Nau accepted the historicity of the story about the gathering of Jews on the Temple Mount and the possibility of their cooperation with the Roman government in an attempt to re-establish the ancient Jewish cult in Jerusalem.[81] Much later, Paul Dilley would accept Nau's position, arguing that the legendary character of the narration somehow reflects certain historical events and its rhetorical language could have been influenced by these events.[82] Dilley furthermore proposed that *Judas Kyriakos*, a fifth-century text depicting Helena, mother of Constantine, as recovering the remnants of Jesus' Cross, constituted in fact a reaction of sorts to the events described in the *Vita*. In other words, both these Christian compositions represent apologetic responses to a historical fifth-century episode of a Jewish ingathering on the Temple Mount.[83] Others, however, have been doubtful regarding the historical authenticity of the *Vita* in general and the depiction of Jewish religious upheaval on the Temple Mount in particular.[84]

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[81] According to Nau ('Deux épisodes,' p. 196), it was a patriotic – 'zionistic' – Jewish movement of Galilean origin with messianic expectations, which he dated to c. 438.

[82] See Dilley, 'Invention of Christian Tradition,' p. 598.

[83] See ibid., pp. 599–601.

[84] See E. A. J. Honigmann, *Le Couvent de Barsauma et le Patriarcat Jacobite d'Antioche et de Syrie* CSCO 146, Subsidia 7 (Louvain, 1954), pp. 6–

On the cautious side, it may be claimed that the whole depiction of Jewish activity on the Temple Mount is nothing but fiction inspired by Deuteronomy 31:7–13, where a renewal of the covenant on the Feast of Tabernacles, involving the general ingathering of Israel, is depicted. It can therefore be suggested that this episode in the *Vita* was engendered by the author's general ideas about Jewish messianism, informed by the biblical passage. Still, even in light of such doubts, it is worth trying to comprehend the purpose served by this narrative episode, undeniably one of the most central and prominent passages in the *Vita*. It should be reiterated that even if the *Vita* was written or finally edited in the sixth or early seventh century, the events underlying the narration could have occurred in the fifth century, and it is there that we have to look for the roots of our literary tradition.

GENESIS RABBAH AND JEWISH MESSIANIC ACTIVISM

In our opinion, a comparative reading of the story from the *Vita* together with another narrative with similar components, composed at roughly the same time as the hypothetical nucleus of the *Vita*, can contribute toward clarifying the issue. This narrative, found in *Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah*, an important rabbinic midrashic anthology (late 4th – early 5th century), reads as follows (*Gen. R.* 64.10): [85]

> In the days of R. Joshua b. Hananiah the [Roman] Empire ordered the Temple to be rebuilt. Papos and Lulianos set tables from Acco as far as Antioch and provided those who had come up from the Diaspora with their basic needs. Thereupon the Samaritans went and warned the King [quoting from Ezra]: 'Now be it known to the King that if this city is rebuilt and its walls completed, they (the Jews) will stop paying *mindah*, *belo* or *halakh*, which will eventually harm the kingdom'

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23. But see 'Introduction' to Palmer, *Vita*; Stemberger, 'Barsauma's Travels to the Holy Land and Jewish History.'

[85] For the original text, see *Bereshit Rabba*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 710–711. The translation is by H. Freedman from *Midrash Rabba Genesis* (London, 1951), p. 580, with some alterations.

> (Ezra 4:13) … *Mindah* is based on land measurement, *belo* is a poll-tax, *halakh* is androtiga.[86] 'Yet what can I do,' – said the King, – 'as I have already given the order?' 'Send a decree to them that they should change the site of the construction work or add five cubits thereto or lessen it by five cubits – they will then withdraw from it of their own accord.' Now, when the epistles with the decree arrived, the congregation was assembled on the plain of Beth Rimmon. They burst out weeping, and considered revolting against the Roman power. Thereupon they [the leaders] decided: Let a wise man go and pacify the congregation. And they said: 'Let R. Joshua b. Hananiah go, as he is a master of the Torah (*scholastiqon de-oraita*)!' He therefore went and preached to them: 'A Lion devoured its prey and a bone stuck in his throat. Thereupon he proclaimed: "I will reward anyone who removes it!" An Egyptian heron, which has a long beak, came, pulled the bone out and demanded his reward. "Go!" the Lion replied, "your reward is that you will be able to boast that you entered the lion's mouth in peace and came out in peace." Even so, let us be satisfied that we entered into dealings with this nation in peace and have emerged in peace.'

The plot focuses on the attempt to rebuild the Temple and thus renew Jewish worship on the Temple Mount, with a mass of enthusiastic Jewish pilgrims anticipating the event. Papos and Lulianos, two famous brothers from Laodicea,[87] were funding this

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[86] This entire sentence is a gloss interpreting the terms in the biblical verse. The word *androtiga*, seemingly stemming from Greek is uncertain; see M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan, 1990), p. 284. Theodor (*Bereshit Rabbah*, 711), however, suggested, according to the meaning of the Greek root of the word, that it is a sort of bill.

[87] For the long history of confusion between these two historical figures from Laodicea and Jewish martyrs from Lidda, see W. Horbury, 'Papus and Lulianus in Jewish Resistance to Rome,' in J. Taragona Borras and A. Saenz-Badillos (eds), *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the 20th Century I* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 289–295. See also J. Schwartz, *Lod (Lydda), Israel: From*

'Zionist enterprise,' providing food for the ingathering exiles, who came from Antioch to Acco (Acre). Yet due to the menacing machinations of the Samaritans, the treacherous Others of the midrash, the whole project was stranded. To prevent a Jewish revolt and the inevitable bloodshed, the leaders of the people appealed to rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah, the famous 'Torah *scholasticon*,' who managed to alleviate the disappointment of the agitated crowd with the help of the Aramaic version of an Aesopian fable. A parallelism is evident between the description of the passionately enthusiastic Jews at the beginning of the story in *Genesis Rabbah* and the depiction of Jewish enthusiasm in the *Vita*. Both texts highlight the Jewish anticipation of the near end of their dispersion and the role of the Roman Empire in that eschatological development – in *Genesis Rabbah* as in the *Vita* it is the Romans who order Jerusalem to be restored as the city of the Jewish sanctuary.

According to the story in *Genesis Rabbah*, the Roman authorities decided to grant the Jews permission to build the Temple. In light of the motif's appearance in the two apparently independent narratives – the *Vita* and the midrash – it seems that the idea of rebuilding the Temple, with not only Jews but also others being able to sacrifice there, was familiar to the storytellers of the period.[88] Ephrem the Syrian's 'Hymns against Julian' supply

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Its Origins through the Byzantine Period, 5600 B.C.E. – 640 C.E. (Oxford, 1991), pp. 124–125.

[88] See, for example, Y. Papadoyannakis, 'A Debate about the Rebuilding of the Temple in Sixth-Century Byzantium,' in G. Gardner and K. L. Osterloh (eds), *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (Tübingen, 2008), pp. 372–382. Papadoyannakis shows that in fifth-century Christian compositions, Jews are routinely portrayed as demanding from the imperial authorities to reestablish the Temple at its historical site. This narrative pattern seems to have served certain needs of Christian propaganda of the period. We have seen, however, that a similar motif appears not only in Christian narratives but also in rabbinic tradition – which may indicate its wide currency and/or underlying historical reality. See also A. S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, (Stanford, 2004), p. 195,

a fine early example of this motif.[89] It is difficult to know whether the actions of Emperor Julian had induced such imaginary plots or whether an early version of such a story – current among Jews and Gentiles – prompted the decision of the anti-Christian emperor to grant the Jews a new Temple.[90]

The rabbinic narrator situated his plot in the distant past – namely, in the period of Joshua ben Hananiah and in accordance with what scholars have identified as reflections of historical reality from the time of Hadrian. The latter, before embracing an anti-Jewish policy, attempted to appease the Jews, offering them to rebuild the Temple; but the opposition of the Samaritans prevented the reconstruction.[91] However, this identification is problematic because the other protagonists of the story – in addition to Joshua ben Hananiah – are the brothers Lulianos and Papos, who seem to have lived during the reign of Trajan.[92] Even if we cannot positively identify the echoes of certain events of the second, third or fourth centuries underlying this remarkable story, it stands to reason that the narrator evoked these figures from the Jewish past to respond to the challenges of his own time.[93]

Let us sum up the substantial narrative elements in the midrashic story that run parallel to those in the *Vita*: (a) the resolution of the Roman authorities to allow Jewish worship at the Temple compound; (b) letters to communities in Asia Minor and the mass arrival of Jews, propelled by messianic enthusiasm, to

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for supposed Jewish machinations to restore the Temple being interpreted by Christians as a follow-up to the killing of the Messiah.

[89] *Hymns against Julian 1*, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, CSCO 175, ed. E. Beck (Louvain, 1957), pp. 71–75. For an English translation, see *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (tr. and intr. K. E. McVey; New York, 1989).

[90] For discussion of the Jewish desire to rebuild the Temple as a *topos* in early Christian literature, see Papadoyannakis, 'Debate about the Rebuilding of the Temple'; Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, p. 195.

[91] See A. Oppenheimer (ed. N. Oppenheimer), *Between Rome and Babylon: Studies in Jewish Leadership and Society* (Tübingen, 2005), p. 234.

[92] See Horbury, 'Papus and Lulianus.'

[93] See Oppenheimer, *Between Rome and Babylon*, p. 234 n.35

Palestine; (c) the ultimate inevitable failure of the project. It is known that the Samaritans featured in *Genesis Rabbah* constituted a strong and politically influential party in late fifth century Palestine.[94] The rabbinic narrator might have been aware of these political realities.

A hypothesis may be proposed that the narrator of the story in *Genesis Rabbah* knew of some unfortunate occurrence that had taken place on the Temple Mount around his time and responded to it by his narrative adaptation; yet in the absence of clear proof, the question will necessarily remain open. It is instructive, however, that both Christian and Jewish narrators attest to an aversion to messianic activism, which was probably widespread among the (non-rabbinic) Jewish masses.

CONCLUSION

A violent conflict between Samaritans and Jews on the one hand and young Barsauma on the other during the latter's first pilgrimage to Palestine is described in the *Vita* as engendering a desire for vengeance against these two groups during his later pilgrimages. We have observed, however, a difference in the ascetic's attitude toward the Jews and the Samaritans of the Holy Land. The Samaritans, dwelling outside the region of Jerusalem, are presented as a natural target for the pilgrim's mission, with miracles performed by Barsauma and disputations about the meaning of Scripture as the main vehicles of his success. This interest in the Samaritans may derive from their being a strong and influential community in late fifth and early sixth century Palestine.[95]

Yet the competition with the Jews, who contested the Christian claim to Jerusalem, is much more acrimonious, with no

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[94] A. D. Crown (*The Samaritans* [Tübingen, 1989], pp. 70–73) speculates that the Samaritans moreover actively participated in conflicts between representatives of various christological tendencies.

[95] Although in the general statement addressing the second and most violent of Barsauma's pilgrimages (ca 419–422) not only synagogues and pagan temples but also 'meeting places of Samaritans' are mentioned, the latter do not feature in the detailed description of the ascetic's destructive acts.

attempt to convert them. In fact, the Jewish Other – like the pagan one – is portrayed as belonging to the past,[96] and Jewish places of worship as doomed to be destroyed. Twice Barsauma encounters Palestinian Jews, and both times the encounter causes wrath and destruction. First, he and his fellow travelers destroy a synagogue – compared to the Temple of Solomon – at Rabat Moab, and later God's wrath culminates in striking the Jews at the site of their ancient sanctuary on the Temple Mount. Thus the literary strategies of the treatise, containing a fuzzy historical kernel, situate the conflict with the Jews along the route to Jerusalem, the pilgrimage's ultimate destination.[97] Whereas all of Barsauma's encounters with the Jews take place along his planned route to the Holy City, for the sake of the Samaritans he is willing to make a detour through Sebastia.[98] The narrator characteristically ignores the Galilee, replete with Christian holy sites in the midst of a dense Jewish population,[99] seemingly to further accentuate the importance of Jerusalem as the focus of the supersessionist claim for the sacred space.[100]

Prominent among the narrative strategies of the *Vita* is the remarkable overlap between Barsauma and Empress Eudocia's visits to Jerusalem. This reflects the author's preoccupation with the motif of the struggle for control over the Holy Land vis-à-vis the Jews, the imperial authorities and local clergy being suspected of religious deviations of which the sympathetic treatment of the Jews is an important side effect. In fact, the narrator sets Eudocia in the situation of a proto-typical choice between the path of Emperor Constantine, to whom the prohibition of Jewish

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[96] But cf. the episode of a Jewish seaman's conversion outside the Holy Land (*Vita* 79).

[97] *Vita* 76.1.

[98] See *Vita* 80, 84. See also J. Hahn, '"It Is Not lawful for Samaritans to Have Dealings with Christians!" Samaritans in the Life of Barsauma,' (forthcoming).

[99] See S. Klein, 'The Travelogue of the Journey to the Land of Israel,' *Meassef Zion* 6 (1934), p. 29.

[100] It should be noted, however, that the early fourth-century Bordeaux pilgrim did not yet include the Galilee in his itinerary.

residence in Jerusalem is traditionally attributed, and that of Emperor Julian remembered as collaborating with the Jews to rebuild the Temple.

The *Vita*'s author, in whose cultural world the map of sacred Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem had long existed, was also aware of competing Jewish claims for their own sacred landscape. He, therefore, needed to elaborate an etiological story that would explain the cleansing of the Holy City from the presence of the Jewish Other. Faithful to his approach, the narrator leads Barsauma through the Holy Land's memorable sites, particularly those in the Holy City, successively restoring their 'profaned' sanctity. Characteristically, Barsauma teaches a lesson not only to the Jews, the Samaritans and the pagans but also, and indeed more so, to the Christians who have strayed from the right path. They have sinned either by expressing sympathy for the Jews or by christological deviations, making themselves easy prey to devastating demonic influence. Connection to the Jews, in addition to their being the ultimate Other, thus becomes a central feature of the story – where the decline of Christianity in Palestine is diagnosed, the shadow of the Jew appears. Therefore, unlike the usual hagiographic descriptions of pilgrimage as the crowning phase of a believer's spiritual development, the *Vita* exemplifies the peculiar narrative pattern of an ascetic coming to Palestine from the East in a fierce crusade aimed at cleansing the sacred realm of the Holy Land. This outstanding strategy – together with other narrative devices shared by the *Vita* with other hagiographical compositions – was clearly tailored to glorify the protagonist and establish his towering presence in the minds of Syriac-speaking Christians of the radical monophysite camp.

In the context of the struggle for hegemony in the Holy City, the local church is viewed in the *Vita* – together with the secular authorities – as having abandoned the way of Constantine, who had justly forbidden the Jews to celebrate their festivals in Jerusalem. However, when it comes to countering Jewish claims to the city, the narrator, like his protagonist, supports the church's fight against the Jewish Other. Similarities with other Christian narratives recorded in the fifth century and meant to justify the

appropriation of synagogues and their conversion into churches vis-à-vis the sometimes-vacillating policies of the imperial authorities have been noted.[101] In the Jerusalem context of the *Vita* the tension runs even higher, as the appropriation is applied to the desolate site of the Temple, the target of undying Jewish messianic aspirations, which, according to the author, have to be zealously suppressed.

We have also discussed the possible historical context of the *Vita*'s narrative strategies. The image of Barsauma in the *Vita*, checked against other relevant sources, confirms both the general outline of his historical character and what is known about contemporary Syrian monasticism in general: extreme asceticism, violent activism, participation in theological polemics and, finally, conflict with the Church establishment. Even extreme views regarding the nature of the body of Christ may reflect an opinion already existing in Barsauma's time, though it would become truly prominent only later. All this, however does not preclude questioning the factual accuracy of the *Vita*'s descriptions – especially, the depiction of events in Jerusalem during Barsauma's last visit to the Holy Land.

We have argued that even when there is room for doubt concerning historical details, the composition is reliable in one important aspect: It faithfully reflects the perception of reality inherited from the *Vita*'s Christian environment and interpreted by the author – namely, the perception of the 'Jewish threat' to the Christian sacred geography of the Holy City. This perception largely shaped the emerging hagiographic literature, where it was given forceful expression, of which the *Vita* is an outstanding example. Therefore, even if our story may be viewed as somewhat similar to the narrative pattern relating to the Christian appropriation of synagogues, the *Vita* seems rather to reflect what

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[101] See Severus of Minorca, *Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*, ed. and trans. S. Bradbury (Oxford, 1966); E. D. Hunt, 'St. Stephen in Minorca: An Episode in Jewish-Christian Relations in the Early 5th Century A.D.,' *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 33 (1982), pp. 106–123; Dilley, 'The Invention of Christian Tradition.'

its author perceived as an ultimate struggle for Jerusalem against Jewish claims.

Finally, it turns out that the midrash *Genesis Rabbah* attests to a similar image of the radical Jewish Other – here meaning distinct from the rabbinic elite – which wants to ascend *en masse* to the Temple Mount and reestablish there the ancient sanctuary and its cult. We are faced, then, with two testimonies from two different imagined communities that reject – each on its own grounds – Jewish activism aspiring to regain control over Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. We suggest that the responses of the two sides – between which a literary connection does not seem probable – reflected the same fear of a phenomenon still deemed dangerous in the fifth century and perhaps even later. It is at least in that sense that our two narratives reflect a deep-seated *psychological* reality. The existence of these two independent yet coordinated literary traditions may also strengthen the historical plausibility of a turmoil of this kind.

CONCLUSION

This volume has discussed a number of case studies pertaining to group-identity strategies in late antique Syria-Mesopotamia. Specifically, we focused on traditions indicating interaction between Judaism and Christianity or among various Christian groups in the region, as well as their 'conversation' with other neighboring cultures, e.g., Zoroastrianism and paganism. The emphasis here was on multifaceted modes of interaction between the Greek- and Syriac-speaking variants within Syrian-Mesopotamian Christianity and between Syriac Christian and Jewish traditions of mainly Babylonian provenance. Our investigation thus also focused on some peculiar hybrid traits that can be discerned among late antique Christian and Jewish communities in Syria-Mesopotamia. The specific insights yielded by the approach adopted in this volume not only shed light on the conceptual make-up of individual works, but hopefully contribute to a better understanding of boundary-drawing processes.

Within the complex cultural predicament of Syrian Christianity, it is possible to discern certain local patterns of language, concepts and religious practice as potential markers delineating a group identity. It may be further suggested that the emergence of a Syriac-speaking Church in close contact with Greek-speaking Syrian communities might in turn have affected the latter and produced a local hybrid of Greek Christianity. The case of Theodore of Mopsuestia provides an important indication that the traffic of ideas and perceptions between Syriac and Greek discourse in Syria did not flow only one way. It appears moreover that some fundamental attitudes and theological notions prevalent among Aramaic-speaking Christians were absorbed by their Greek-speaking brethren. As for interaction with Jews, our research has further elucidated certain characteristic patterns of cultural interaction engendered by the geographical and cultural affinity of

the two communities – with their shared Aramaic (Syriac) language and heritage.

Part One dealt with Theodore of Mopsuestia as the prime representative of Syrian Greek Christianity, with its multifaceted links to Syriac and Jewish traditions, primarily through the lens of his *Commentary on John*. Theodore's special position as well as his subsequent paramount influence on East-Syrian Christianity – and the survival of a great deal of his writings in Syriac – confirm a plausible model of an indigenous early Syriac Christianity's dynamic interaction with the Greek tradition mediated by Greek Christianity in Syria-Mesopotamia, with the latter's influence eventually becoming dominant.

Chapter One showed how Theodore's exegetical enterprise, engendered by the impetus to respond to the main theological crises of his generation, led him to further develop and modify the loose-union christology solution inherited from his master, Diodore, applying it in the hermeneutical context of his detailed *Commentary on John*. The Gospel narrative furnishes the opportunity to highlight and elaborate on this loose-union christology and the enhanced humanity of the assumed man through the prosopic conjunction of dignity. In fact, the *Commentary* corroborates Theodore's statement regarding the consistency of its christology with that of his earlier treatise *On the Incarnation*. Moreover, it provides many details and nuances unattested in his other surviving works.

A sobering dialectic may be noted here: Theodore's enterprise, aspiring to safeguard the immutable divinity of the logos vis-à-vis the Arians – often branded by their opponents as Judaizers – would, in turn, provide the seeds of contention for later christological disputes. It is in the context of those disputes that the Interpreter himself would be anachronistically labeled – together with other diphysites, especially of the Antiochene School – as a Nestorian and a Judaizer.

Chapter Two highlighted the centrality of the concept of progressive development as a core hermeneutical principle grounded in the Interpreter's theological outlook. This principle is also consistent with Theodore's exegetical method, inherited from his teacher Diodore of Tarsus, ingeniously elaborated and bequeathed to his disciples of the so-called Antiochene school. We have shown that development-centered interpretation is applied in

the *Commentary* to a variety of central issues in the Gospel narrative pertaining to the notions of sacred history and christology. For Theodore, even post-incarnation times are distinguished by the *gradual* disclosure of christological truths. Though the incarnation is viewed as the watershed in the unfolding history of salvation, Jesus' disciples were not in fact ripe for a full recognition of the incarnation due to their deficient conceptual preparation. Even the final enlightenment following the resurrection is distinguished by a gradual development.

The general framework of gradual development is not limited to progressive revelation but is epitomized in Theodore's outstanding concept of Jesus' own development regarding the mode of union in the incarnation. This is clearly dictated by Theodore's insistence on full humanity as the subject of development in Christ, emphasized against Arian and Apollinarian views. Theodore further presupposes that Christ needed an additional influx of God's grace during his lifetime in order to achieve moral perfection. Theodore seeks to conceptualize in christological terms also the events of the post-resurrection stage, incorporating it into his overall scheme of the progressive development of Jesus' humanity and its *mode of conjunction* with the logos. Theodore's concept of progressive development in the *homo assumptus* also modifies Diodore of Tarsus' radical loose-union christology through the notion of dignity, signifying the upgraded humanity of Christ.

Theodore's bold and consistent postponement of Christ's full divinization beyond the limits of his lifetime indeed seems unprecedented and indicative of Theodore's original genius, recruited to the polemics of his time. This underlying development leitmotif appears to be a radical expression of Theodore's low-christology rationalistic hermeneutics employed within the constraints of contemporary theological discourse. We noted an affinity with both the literally inclined exegesis and the low christology characterizing such prominent early Syriac writers as Aphrahat and Ephrem, as well as the Hellenized Syrian Eusebius of Emesa.

Chapter Three dealt with the implications of Theodore's notion of development for his religious anthropology and soteriology. We showed that Theodore transposed his model of Jesus' gradual enhancement through the dignity of the logos to the

soteriological trajectory of the disciples and believers in general. Theodore idiosyncratically applied his christological terminology of conjunction also to the unity between the enhanced humanity of Christ and that of his followers. Thus the soteriological path of the latter is likewise presented as a gradual upgrading of their conjunction with the *homo assumptus*.

In the context of his polemic with the *pneumatomachoi*, Theodore strove to safeguard not only the consubstantiality of the Spirit but also its pivotal role in all crucial soteriological phases: in the three foundational junctions of Jesus' own christological development – incarnation, baptism and resurrection – and in the following empowerment of the disciples and believers. One can discern a certain tension in Theodore's thought about the *nous* as the primary locus of cognitive conjunction between Jesus' empowered humanity and that of the believers, and his interpretation of the Eucharist as an essential complementary *corporeal channel* of conjunction. Like Theodore's developmental loose-union christology, his religious anthropology is characterized by the salient emphasis on the humanity of Christ as the actual soteriological medium and channel of humanity's conjunction with the divine.

Chapter Four addressed Theodore's stance on Jews and Judaism. It was shown that for Theodore, Jesus' Jewish contemporaries represented a pre-incarnation stage of revelation and cognition, a *praeparatio evangelica* of sorts, a matrix common to the Jews in general and the circle of Jesus' disciples. Theodore showed a keen awareness of what in modern scholarship would be called the Jewish setting of the nascent 'Jesus movement.' He further ascribed to this setting a crucial importance for a proper understanding of the disciples' conduct and beliefs as anchored in the social and religious reality of their time. Characteristically, Theodore discerned a clear overlap between the disciples' pre-Easter epistemic limitations and those of the Jews. This reflects what we refer to as a mitigated supersessionism expressing a measure of understanding of the Jewish predicament and their immanent inability to grasp the Messiah's nature.

There are indirect indications of Theodore's contacts with Jews and/or Jewish biblical exegesis. This chapter, however, focused on the function of the Jews in the Interpreter's overall theological construct of progressive revelation promulgated

especially in his *Commentary on John*. In contradistinction to a traditional Christian paradigm of the ongoing religious decline of the Jews, Theodore's positive appraisal of biblical Israel as cognizant of divine truths is suggestively devoid of that motif. The Interpreter's idea of the pre-incarnated logos proclaiming God's will to ancient Israel informs Theodore's perception of the revelatory continuum and cognitive development, from the biblical past to Christ. We have shown moreover that for Theodore the biblical Jews' deficient theological cognition is derived not from their unsatisfactory religious stance but rather from the objectively veiled nature of the revelation granted to them. We also noted the Interpreter's positive attitude to the religious precepts of the Jews and his uncommon view of Jesus as a strictly Torah-abiding Jew. Again, all this, seemingly reflecting a somewhat unusual modicum of sympathy, is what we brand as mitigated supersessionism.

The discussion of Syrian Christianities' possible links to their coterminous Jewish culture, started in Part One, was the focus of Part Two. Here we discussed parallel strategies employed by Jewish and Syriac Christian sources vis-à-vis their common Mesopotamian cultural backdrop. We investigated the meaning of these parallels as witnesses for broader cultural patterns and also offered some observations with regard to their possible function as respective identity markers.

Our investigation in Chapter Five focused on two narratives depicting the study of Scripture as a foundational step in the Persian converts' initiation into Christianity and Judaism respectively. The Persian newcomer is portrayed, in both the Jewish and the Christian narratives, as one who rejects the 'trivial' course of study based on the knowledge of written letters. While the literary interdependence of the rabbinic and Syriac traditions under discussion cannot be excluded, we suggested that the evidence points rather to an underlying common cultural *topos* of a wonder-child rejecting the accepted course of elementary education. In our narratives, however, it already functions in the context of religious initiation. The narratives thus bear witness to the boundary-drawing strategies employed by the two minority groups to define their identity vis-à-vis a dominant culture commonly perceived as founded on orality. In this context, the study of Scripture stands out as a shared marker of the minorities' self-definition with a number of characteristic differences.

Whereas a number of recent studies have highlighted the emphasis on oral tradition as an important identity marker in the late antique Jewish polemic with Christianity, our investigation shows that in a dissimilar context – with Zoroastrians as the Other – the strategy of identity marking employed by the Jewish side was different. Although not completely abandoning orality, it stressed instead the prime importance of the ability to read the written tradition, based on letter-centered literacy. The rabbinic conversion narratives discussed in this chapter thus highlight the relative nature of the stances taken in polemical contexts – even when they pertain to such a core issue as the centrality of the Oral Torah. The Syriac initiation narrative, presenting an unabashedly anti-oral stance, provides an instructive backdrop to the mixed strategy employed in the rabbinic variant.

In Chapter Six we presented two more cases exemplifying the reciprocal potential of a comparative study of Syriac Christian and Babylonian rabbinic sources – even regarding traditions that do not show signs of direct dependence or contact. In the first case, the comparative analysis of narratives representing the two minority groups both highlighted their different religious agendas and allowed for restoring the otherwise unattested patterns of the broader cultural – namely, 'pagan' Mesopotamian/Babylonian – backdrop with which they converse. This 'restoration track,' probed in Chapter Five, may be seen as analogous to the attempts, *mutatis mutandis*, to restore elements of first-century 'common Judaism' on the basis of patterns shared by two minority groups represented by the Dead Sea Scrolls and earliest Christian writings.

The second case further exemplifies how the Christian author of Barsauma's *Vita* adapts and 'baptizes' patterns of common cultural tradition concerning wondrous adventures to suit his hagiographic polemical agenda. Characteristic here is the collation of a whole range of such folk patterns with only light strokes of Christianization added to the dramatic incident. In this sense, another sea-storm episode addressed in Chapter Seven constitutes a correcting replay of sorts – with the folk elements omitted and Barsauma's role highlighted, the Christianization becomes complete. Rabbinic sources, employing similar motifs of broader circulation while Judaizing them, shed additional light on the narrative strategies of both Talmudic and Christian narrators.

Chapter Seven further developed the discussion of the Barsauma *Vita*'s narrative strategies of identity making – in this case, vis-à-vis various religious groups that the pilgrim monk encounters in the Holy Land. Whereas Samaritans feature in Barsauma's successful efforts to convert them to Christianity, Jews and pagans are portrayed as the unwanted Other clearly belonging to the past. Most prominently, the Jewish Temple is destined to remain in ruins as the locus of abomination. Among the narrative strategies of the *Vita*, prominent is the remarkable overlap between Barsauma's and Empress Eudocia's visits to Jerusalem, reflecting the author's preoccupation with the struggle for control over the Holy Land.

Jerusalem's sacred Christian geography having been long established, the author was nevertheless concerned with competitive Jewish claims for their own sacral map. He therefore needed to create an etiological story explaining how the holy city had once been cleansed from the presence of the Jewish Other. Characteristically, Barsauma teaches a lesson not only to Jews, Samaritans and pagans but also to Other Christians. The latter are presented as having sinned either through sympathy towards Jewish aspirations or by theological deviations. Thus, connection to Jews, the ultimate Other, becomes a central marker of the story's identity shaping, with the *Vita* exemplifying the peculiar narrative pattern of a holy campaign by an ascetic from the East to cleanse the sacred space of the Holy Land. We noted here similarities to other roughly contemporaneous Christian narratives justifying the seizure of synagogues and their conversion to churches, often with the silent approval of the imperial authorities. However, in the Jerusalem context of the *Vita* the appropriation is applied to the desolate site of the Temple, the target of undying Jewish messianic aspirations, which, according to the author, should be zealously suppressed.

We also discussed the possible historical context of the *Vita*'s narrative strategies. In general, the image of Barsauma in the *Vita* when checked vis-à-vis other relevant sources confirms both the general outline of his character and what we know about Syrian monasticism at large: extreme asceticism, violent activism, participation in the theological quarrels of the time, siding with extreme monophysite positions and, finally, conflict with the Church establishment. All this, however, does not preclude doubts

regarding the historicity of the events recounted by the *Vita*. We have nevertheless argued that the composition is reliable in an especially important aspect: It faithfully reflects *the perception of reality* inherited and interpreted by the author – namely, the perception of the 'Jewish threat' to the Christian pilgrimage map, enhanced by the perceived threat from the *Vita*'s Christian deviants. This perception – of which our author is an outstanding example – largely shaped the emerging hagiographic literature.

The Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* also attests the image of a radical Jewish Other thronging to the Temple Mount to reestablish their cult. These two testimonies allow for a comparison of identity-shaping strategies by competing imagined communities distancing themselves – out of differing concerns – from Jewish messianic activism. The responses of both seem to have reflected a shared fear of a phenomenon still considered dangerous in the fifth-sixth centuries. We suggested moreover that the existence of two largely parallel and seemingly independent literary traditions strengthens the historical plausibility of this Jewish affair.

This volume, then, highlights the complexity of identity-shaping strategies in the multifaceted religious landscape of late antique Syria-Mesopotamia, proposing elements of a general frame of reference that could contextualize the evidence as well as avenues for reciprocal cultural communication between diverse religious groups.

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INDEX

INDEX OF NAMES AND SUBJECTS

Aaron 12–13, 201
Abraham 50, 88, 140
Abū Mansūr al-Thaʿālibī 145
Acco (Acre) 208, 210
Adam 8–10, 15–16, 88
Academies 139–140, 165, 168
  Heavenly Academy 139
Adoptionism 72
Aesopos 210
Aggadic 151
Aha b. Jacob 145
Ahariman 174
Ahiqar 161–162
Alexandria, Alexandrian School 17, 140, 188
Allegorism, Allegorists 19, 62
Alphabet, Letters of 127, 131–137, 141–142, 147, 152–162, 221
Angels 41, 48, 57–59, 70, 77, 79, 92, 106, 117, 165–166, 169, 172–174, 176, 191, 200–201
Annunciation 73
Anthropology 11, 15–16, 19, 24, 81–101, 219–220
Antioch, Antiochene (tradition, school) 9, 11–12, 14, 16–25, 30–32, 36, 56, 64–65, 78–79, 104, 120, 197, 205, 208, 210, 218
Aphrahat 2, 4, 6–15, 19, 22, 25, 31, 34, 41, 58–59, 96, 106, 108, 120, 219
Apollinarius, Apollinarian 31–33, 36–38, 46, 55, 72, 80–81, 94, 100, 219
Apostles 13, 57, 65, 81, 98, 113, 140
Aqiva 133
Aquilas the Proselyte 127
Arabs, Arabic 145, 147, 161, 187
Aramaic 3–4, 8, 17, 22, 123, 134, 154, 161, 164, 168, 210, 217–218
Arius, Arian 14, 23, 31–33, 35–38, 40–43, 46, 55, 57, 71–72, 76, 79–81, 94, 100, 106, 112, 218–219
Armenia 124, 149, 206
Ascension 61–62, 64, 74–75, 77, 80, 85, 94, 96
Asceticism 2, 51, 142–143, 146, 167, 171, 181–187, 189, 194–195, 203–205, 212, 214–215, 223
Askleodotos 188
Assumption, Assumed man 36, 38–39, 42–48, 50–52, 54–55, 62, 64–65, 73–77, 81–86, 88–90, 93–98, 100–101, 111, 117, 218, 220

Asterius 33
Astrology 115
Augustine 73, 93, 104
Avesta 147–148
Avot de R. Nathan 129, 137, 158
Babylonia, Babylonian 7, 26, 123, 125, 127–129, 132–135, 139, 152, 165–170, 173–174, 178–179, 190, 192–193, 217, 222
Baptism 12, 72–74, 80, 84–88, 91, 93, 95, 97–98, 101, 116, 119, 220
Barbarian 173, 184–185
Barsauma 26, 163, 170–174, 176, 180–189, 191–200, 202–206, 212, 214–215, 222–223
Basilica of the Martyrion 195
Beth ha-Shoeva 197
Body of Christ (christology) 11–12, 37–38, 53–54, 76–78, 88–90, 98–99, 101, 203, 205–206, 215
Bordeaux Pilgrim 199, 213
Buddha 148
Caesarea (Palestine) 41, 202
Capernaum 190
Cappadocia 183
Chalcedon, Chalcedonian 3, 181, 204–205
Christianization (also 'baptizing' pagan traditions) 124, 174, 179–180, 222
Christology 2, 4, 6–7, 9–12, 15, 17–19, 21, 23–25, 29–30, 33, 35, 38–39, 42–43, 46–47, 52–53, 55, 63, 69–71, 74, 78–80, 82, 93, 96, 99–101, 103, 105, 115–117, 119–120, 204–205, 212, 214, 218–220
Church/Monastery of Holy Sion (Jerusalem) 194, 197
Church of Stephen (Jerusalem) 194
Church of the Anastasis (Jerusalem) 194–195
Circumcision 118
Conjunction (christology) 24, 31, 36–37, 39, 42–45, 47, 51–55, 61, 64–65, 73, 75–77, 80–83, 85–86, 88–91, 93–95, 97–98, 100–101, 218–220
Constantine, Constantinian 196, 206–207, 213–214
Conversion, Convert, Proselyte 25, 123, 125, 127–129, 131–134, 136–138, 142–145, 149–153, 162, 186, 192, 213, 215, 221–223
Creation, Creator 5, 8–10, 14–15, 33–34, 37, 42
Cross 76, 207
Crucifixion 49, 60, 117
Daughter(s) of the Covenant (*Bat Kyama*) 184–185, 204
David, House of David 30–31, 111
Day of Atonement 13
Demons 164, 166, 169, 183, 186, 193, 195, 200, 203–204, 214
Denkard 135
Didymus 37
Dignity (christology) 36–37, 39, 42, 44, 46, 48, 52, 54–55, 62, 64–65, 71–72, 75, 80–81, 83–85, 90, 95, 98, 100–101, 114, 218–219

Diodore of Tarsus 18–19, 30–32, 36, 55, 78, 80, 104, 218–219
Disciples (of Jesus) 46, 48–49, 57, 59–66, 68–69, 75, 77–79, 84–85, 95–97, 100–101, 108–111, 113–114, 119–120, 148, 219–220
East Syrian 11, 23, 30, 218
Edessa 18, 140
Education 130, 133–134, 137, 139–141, 144, 146–147, 152–154, 157, 161–162, 164, 221
Elijah 67, 109–110
Ephrem 2, 4, 7–8, 13, 15–16, 19, 22, 25, 120, 210, 219
Eschatology, Eschatological Prophet 67, 109, 113, 178, 210
Eucharist 60–61, 84, 90–91, 99, 101, 185, 190, 220
Eudocia, Empress 182, 188, 194–196, 200–202, 206–207, 213, 223
Eunomius 33, 37
Eusebius of Caesarea 41, 58
Eusebius of Emesa 18–19, 31, 219
Evagrius of Pontus 146
Eve 10, 15–16
Exorcism 193, 195, 203
Eznik of Kolb 148
Father (God) 8–9, 14, 33–36, 45, 47–48, 50, 54, 60, 62–64, 75–76, 80, 82, 92, 94, 97, 105, 117
Folklore 154, 161, 178–180, 222
Galilee, Galilean 43, 111, 182, 190, 196, 198, 201, 207, 213
Gaza 186
Gentile(s) 128–129, 148, 211
Golgotha 194–195
Grace 38–39, 43–44, 63, 72–75, 77, 80, 82, 84, 86, 88–89, 93, 95, 98–100, 107, 112, 119, 140, 164, 219
Hadrian 196, 206, 211
Hagiography 143, 170, 179, 181, 214–215, 222, 224
Halakha 48, 117, 133, 151, 166, 168
Hanina 190
Hanina b. Dosa (r.) 178
Hebrew, Holy Tongue 14, 20–21, 104, 126, 133–134, 136–137, 158–159
Helena, mother of Constantine 207
Hellenistic 1, 5, 134, 172
Hellespont 173–174
Hercules 184
Heretical, Deviant 32, 41–42, 46–47, 57, 76, 79, 106, 144, 182–183, 189–190, 203–204, 213–214, 223–224
Herodotus 173–174, 176
Hezekiah 20, 103
Hillel 129–132, 150
Hiyya (r.) 165, 167
Holy (Promised) Land, Land of Israel 26, 127, 171, 178–179, 181–183, 186–187, 189–190, 194, 212–215, 223
Holy Man 164, 166, 191, 205
Holy Places, Sacred Geography (Space) 181–182, 194, 207, 213–215, 223–224
Holy Spirit 21, 24, 35, 37, 43–44, 63–64, 66, 71–74, 76–

77, 80, 83–93, 100–101, 105, 109, 116, 160, 191, 193, 220
Hybridity 1, 4, 23, 217
Hypostasis 37, 39, 41–42, 58–59, 79, 92, 106, 108
Identity, Identity Markers, Identity-Shaping, Boundary-Drawing 1–4, 6, 23, 25–26, 57, 123–124, 137–138, 145, 149, 152–153, 163, 167, 181, 185, 191–192, 217, 221–224
Ilfa, Hilfai 165–169
Imperial, Imperial Authorities 181, 186, 189, 196–197, 200–201, 203, 206–211, 213, 215, 223
Incarnation 9,11–12, 14–15, 18, 24, 31, 36–37, 40–41, 47, 54, 57–60, 71–75, 79–80, 93, 95, 101, 105–109, 119, 218–220
Indigenous Syriac Christianity 1, 22, 218
Infancy Gospels 72, 94, 134, 136–137, 154–155, 157, 161–162
Initiation 25–26, 95, 98, 142, 149–152, 154, 181, 183, 221–222
Irenaeus 41, 58
Isis 172
Islam 135, 139
Īšoʿsabran 125, 138–142, 144–147, 149, 157, 163–164, 166
Īšoʿyahb III 138, 163–164
Īšoʿzaka 141
Jerusalem, Holy City 26, 182–183, 186, 189, 194–199, 202–204, 206–207, 210, 212–216, 223
Jews, Judaism 66–69, 103–120, 121, 124–128, 131–132, 135, 138–140, 142–145, 147–148, 150–154, 162–163, 169, 173, 176, 178–179, 181–183, 186–190, 194–203, 206–218, 220–224
Jonah 170–171
John the Baptist 12, 40, 42–44, 67, 69–71, 115–117
John Chrysostom 104, 115
Jordan River 200
Joseph (NT) 134, 154, 156–157, 159–160
Josephus 191
Joshua b. Hananiah (r.) 190, 208–211
Judas Kyriakos 207
Judaizing, Judaizer 23, 55–56, 173–174, 176, 178–180, 204, 218, 222
Julianism 31, 206
Julian, Emperor 207, 211, 214
Justin (Martyr) 41, 58, 138
Karafish 177
Kephalaiah (Manichean) 148
Laodicea 171, 209
Last Supper 91
Lazarus 45
Liturgy 7, 91, 97, 142, 146
Leontius of Byzantium 20, 103
Logos (Word) 5–6, 8–9, 11–12, 14–15, 18, 21, 23–24, 30–48, 50–52, 54, 57–66, 68, 71–77, 79–86, 89, 92–98, 100, 104–109, 111–115, 117, 119, 218–219, 221
Lulianos 208–209, 211

LXX 8
Magi 142, 144–145, 147–148
Mani, Manicheans 124, 147–149
Manna 60, 114
Martyrdom 125, 140, 142, 164, 194, 209
Mary (Jesus' mother) 30–31, 71, 93, 172
Mazdaism 125
Melchizedek 12
Mesopotamia 1–3, 6–7, 23, 25–26, 139, 179, 200, 206, 217–218, 221–222, 224
Messiah 9–13, 36, 46, 65, 67, 69, 107, 109–111, 115, 120, 140, 189, 192, 211, 220
Messianism (Jewish) 66–67, 70, 108–110, 116, 182, 197, 207–208, 211–212, 215, 223–224
Midrash, Beth–Midrash 10, 15, 126–127, 129, 137, 143, 167, 175–176, 182, 208, 210–211, 216, 224
Genesis Rabbah 10, 140, 175, 182, 208, 210, 212, 216, 224
Leviticus Rabbah 10
Deuteronomy Rabbah 158
Canticles Rabbah 10
Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) Rabbah 126–128, 131–135, 137, 142, 166, 176, 190
Pesiqta Rabbati 10
Minorca 188, 215
Miracles 54, 72, 84, 94, 97, 106, 173, 176, 178–179, 183–185, 187, 189, 193, 212, 222
Mishnah 129, 145, 150, 166–168
Tr. Pesahim 150
Tr. Sukkah 197
Tr. Moed Qatan 199
Tr. Ketubbot 167
Tr. B. Metzia 167
Tr. Sanhedrin 191
Missionary Activity, Outreach Strategies 125, 143, 153, 193
Monarchianism 9, 35
Monophysite 11, 26, 181, 203–205, 214, 223
Moses 105, 109, 140, 191
Mystical 181
Myth, Mythological 162, 176
Narratology, Narrative Strategies 1, 16, 24–26, 39–40, 42, 55, 60–61, 63, 66, 71, 74, 78–80, 91, 94, 97, 99–100, 108, 116, 123–128, 132–133, 137, 139, 142–146, 149, 151–155, 157–158, 162–178, 180–183, 185–187, 189, 191, 193–196, 198–199, 201–208, 210–216, 218–219, 221–223
Nathanael 43, 67, 110
Nature (theology) 11–12, 34–37, 39–54, 58–62, 64–65, 68–70, 73–74, 76, 83–84, 88, 91, 93, 95, 97, 99, 105–106, 111–115, 205, 215, 220
Nazareth 43
Nestorian 56, 205, 218
Nicaea, Nicene, 4, 6–7, 14–15, 22, 24, 33, 35, 64–65, 79
Ninth of Ab 196, 206
Nisibis 140

Noah 140
Nous 35–36, 38, 53, 83, 101, 220
Ocean, *Okeanos* 175–176
Old Syriac Gospels 8
Orality 22, 25–26, 123, 126, 130–132, 135, 137–139, 142, 144–145, 147–150, 152–154, 157, 161, 164, 167, 221–222
Origen 8, 34, 41, 58, 70, 77, 83
Orthodoxy 12, 183
Oshaya (r.) 165
Other (Identity marker) 25–26, 125–126, 138, 143, 146–147, 152–153, 187–190, 193, 210, 213–214, 216, 222–224
Pagan, Paganism 1, 7, 25–26, 125, 127–128, 150, 179, 181, 184, 187–189, 212–214, 217, 222–223
Palestine, Palestinian 16, 126–127, 129, 131, 132, 134–135, 139, 167–168, 181, 183, 186–189, 193, 195, 204, 212–214
Papos 208–209, 211
Paraclete 96
Paradise, Garden of Eden 16, 184
Paškeza 177
Passion 46–47, 50, 111–112
Patriarchs (biblical) 9–10, 21, 41, 57, 105–106
Paul 35, 38, 50, 53, 78, 94, 104, 113
Paul of Samosata 9
Pentecost 63
Persian, Iranian 25, 123–128, 131–136, 139–143, 145, 147–142, 152–154, 163, 173–174, 186, 189, 195, 203, 221
Peshitta 22
Peter 113
Petra 182
Philoxenus of Mabbug 71
Phoenicia 187
Pilgrimage, Pilgrims 26, 179, 181–183, 187, 189, 191, 193–195, 197–199, 206, 209, 212–214, 223–224
Pneumatomachoi 24–35, 92, 99–100, 220
Pneumatology 24, 81, 91–100
Preexistence 9, 14–15, 42
Priests, Priesthood 12, 141, 144, 184, 194, 196, 201–202
Prophets, Prophesizing 9, 21, 31, 41, 57, 79, 105–106, 108–109, 111, 147–148, 157, 193, 195
Prosopon 11, 37, 39, 49, 52–55, 81, 83, 218
Psalms 141–142, 144, 146–147
Raba b. Barhana 173
Rabat Moav 182, 188, 213
Rabbinic 6, 8, 10, 16–17, 25–26, 123–124, 128, 134, 137–140, 142–147, 149–151, 153–154, 158, 162–167, 169–171, 173, 175, 178–181, 183–184, 187, 189, 191, 193, 197, 208, 210–212, 216, 221–222
Rav (Abba Aricha) 126, 128, 132–133, 135
Redemption 38, 105, 171, 176, 196, 199
Resurrection 9, 15, 24, 45, 51, 54, 61–66, 68, 74–81, 84–

91, 94–97, 100–101, 109, 113, 177–179, 191–192, 219–220
Revelation 21, 23–25, 57–59, 64, 66, 79, 96, 104–108, 114–115, 117, 119, 219–221
Roman 3, 5, 124, 152–153, 172, 175, 196–197, 200–201, 207–211
Sabbath 48–49, 52, 117, 188, 190, 198
Sabellianism 35
Sadducees 191
Sages 110, 126
Samaritans 26, 116, 181, 186–189, 191–193, 208, 210–214, 223
Samuel (rabbinic sage) 126, 128, 132–133, 135–136
Sasanian 1, 3, 25, 124–125
Satan, Devil 16, 85, 115, 185, 198–200
Sataspes 176
Scribes 135, 156, 194
Scripture, Holy Writ 5, 11, 16–17, 20, 22, 25, 34–35, 41, 103, 112, 126–127, 135–136, 139, 141–143, 145–148, 150–153, 164, 189, 191–192, 212, 221
Sea-Voyage, Tempest 170–171, 174–175, 176–180, 186, 222
Sebastia 182, 189, 213
Second Coming (*parousia*) 62, 67, 109
Serapis 172, 188
Shammai 129–132, 150
Shappur I, II 139
Siloam Spring 197–198
Simeon (NT) 12
Simeon of Emesa 143
Simeon Stylites 188, 197
Sinai 182
Solomon 188, 199–200, 213
Son (Logos) 8, 33–5, 49, 64, 92, 95
Son of God 42–43, 67, 110
Son of Man 47, 51, 61, 74
Soteriology 8, 12–14, 24, 39, 73, 81–101, 219
Soul (christology) 11–12, 37–38, 46, 50, 53–55, 77, 83, 87, 89–90
Stranger, Outsider 126, 143, 152, 162, 183, 185, 194–195, 200
Supersessionism (Mitigated) 21, 25, 69, 79, 104, 107, 112, 114–115, 119–120, 220–221
Synagogue 182, 187–188, 200, 212–213, 215, 223
Tabernacles (Sukkot) 196–197, 208
Talmud, Talmudic 123, 133, 150–151, 153, 167, 177, 179–180, 222
  Palestinian Talmud 167
    Tr. Ta'anit 178, 197
    Tr. Ketubbot 167
    Tr. Qiddushin 167
    Tr. Sanhedrin 10
  Babylonian Talmud 128–129, 132–133, 152, 165, 167–169, 174, 176–177, 192–193
    Tr. Berakhot 192
    Tr. Shabbat 129, 133–134, 137
    Tr. Ta'anit 165–166, 168
    Tr. Yebamot 150
    Tr. Ketubbot 168

Tr. Sotah 144–145, 152, 184
Tr. Gittin 158
Tr. B. Qama 183
Tr. B. Bathra 173, 177
Tr. Sanhedrin 10
Tarbo 125
Temple, Temple Mount (Jerusalem) 60, 111, 118, 151, 182, 188, 195–201, 206–216, 223–224
Theodore of Mopsuestia 18, 20–25, 29–120, 217–220
Theodoret of Cyrrhus 21, 104
Thomas 65–66
Topos 25–26, 143, 151, 163, 167, 169, 179, 184, 187, 192, 211, 221
Torah, Law 10, 66, 104–105, 109, 113, 116, 119, 126, 128–131, 133, 136–137, 143, 151–152, 154, 166–167, 169, 173, 189, 209–210, 221–222
Oral Torah 130–132, 137, 154, 167, 222
Tosefta
Tr. Arachin 197
Tr. Parah 197
Tr. Taʿanit 197
Tr. Moed Qatan 199
Tractate Gerim 10, 151
Trajan 211
Transfiguration 78
Trinitarian (theology) 2, 4, 6–7, 33, 65, 92–93, 97, 107
Wonder-Child 151, 154, 157, 161–162, 221
Xerxes 173
Yehuda Hinduʾa (r.) 177
Yohanan b. Napaha (r.) 165–166, 168
Yose (r.) 167
Zaccheus (*Infancy Gospel of Thomas*) 155–156
Zerubbabel 20, 103
Zoroastrianism 25, 123–125, 127, 138–140, 142–149, 152–153, 174, 217, 222

INDEX OF BIBLICAL VERSES

Old Testament

Genesis
1:5 34
1:26 8
6:4 43
17:1 14
Exodus
3:14 14, 173
Deuteronomy
15:4 165
15:11 165
27:26 105
31:7–13 208
32:3 172
Isaiah
1:2 44
9:1–2 43
Psalms
82:6 44
Ecclesiastes
1:8 190
7:8 126–127

Daniel
4:27 195

Ezra
4:12 209

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

1 Enoch
49:1–9 9–10

New Testament

Matthew
2:4 110
3:17 44
4:15 43
5:7 196
5:14–15 13
25:31–46 196

Mark
5:41 192

Luke
2:25–35 12
3:10–17 48
13:10–17 117

John 198
1:1 34
1:3 92
1:4 82
1:6–10 70, 115, 117
1:9–10 41, 58, 106
1:12–13 84–85, 106
1:14 15, 40, 44
1:15–18 44, 70
1:16 44, 83–84
1:18 41, 58
1:25 67
1:25–26 110
1:30 42
1:34 42
1:46 43
1:49 67, 110
2:14–16 111
3:3 87
5:2–18 48, 117
5:9–47 48, 69, 114
5:20 68, 114
5:22 44
5:30 45
6:1–14 90
6:27 90
6:35 13
6:53 90
6:58 60
6:62 47
6:63 100
7:34 67, 110
8:12 13
8:14 51, 69, 114
8:16 69, 115
8:56–58 50
9:7 197
10:7–14 13
10:15 45
10:16–18 46
10:30 111
10:36 13
11:15 13
11:41–42 45
12:23 51, 61
12:34 110
13:1 46
14:6 13
14:6–7 63
14:10–13 52
14:11 47

14:28 76
15:1–5 13
15:26 92
16:12–14 35, 63, 92, 95
16:28 50, 62
17:3 68, 113
17:4–5 75
17:11 76
20:19–23 84
20:22 95
20:20–28 65
20:26 78
Acts
1:11 45
23:7–8 191
Romans
1:2–4 87
7:21–25 53
8:11 94
1 Corinthians
15:44 78
2 Corinthians
3:12–16 119
5:4 40
Galatians
3:23 104
Ephesians
4:15–16 97
Philippians
3:21 89
Colossians
2:19 97
Hebrews
1:3 35
12:29 35